

A DELL BOOK
DELL
237

HOUSE OF DARKNESS

ALLAN MACKINNON



WITH CRIME MAP ON BACK COVER

A DELL MYSTERY



HOUSE OF DARKNESS

Persons this *Mystery* is about—

COLIN OGILVIE, a husky young Scot, has drifted happily from place to place since the war, and has succeeded in delaying domesticity for some time. He is reluctantly returning to England to teach.

KAY LORING, according to Colin, has the face and figure that happens only to the other fellow. His first encounters with her leave him feeling that Fate could have arranged things a lot better.

JERRY GRAY, an old friend, who suddenly turns up in Cairo with an important message for Colin.

SIR ALAN DREXTER, 40, a slim baronet with clean-cut features and humorous eyes, heads a Home Office department investigating a dubious cult.

SEWELL, the prophet of Christian Retrospect, a religious cult, is tall and gaunt. He has the face of an ascetic, a spell-binding voice, and a colossal gift for self-deception.

COLONEL STANLEY, Kay's guardian and Drexter's deputy, is a distinguished old soldier; an artificial leg causes him to limp slightly. The mysterious *they*, for some obscure reason, are determined to prevent a meeting between the Colonel and Colin.

CHIEF INSPECTOR DUNCAN MACCALLUM, of Scotland Yard, whose enormous build makes the husky Colin seem almost puny, ruefully admits the "House of Darkness" is out of his jurisdiction.

AVRIL TRENT, a tall, slim actress, apparently provides Sewell with some of the less spiritual comforts. She likes almost all men.

DR. PARTRIDGE, reputedly Sewell's right-hand man, is a soulless old crook obviously not in Christian Retrospect from any altruistic motives.

CLAIRE VENESS, a shrewd, attractive American widow, finds an unexpected use for her professional skill as a consulting beautician while on a holiday in the Scottish highlands.

INSPECTOR DAVID STAMMERS, of Scotland Yard, is a good-looking young man who does an efficient and thorough job on his cases.

HOUSE OF DARKNESS

What this *Mystery* is about—

• • • An unaccountable MURDER in Cairo which backfires horribly in England . . . A seemingly innocuous VERBAL MESSAGE which threatens the life of its bearer . . . A ROOM viciously slashed to shreds while its occupant bathes . . . A BODY in the back seat of a car driven by a pretty girl . . . PHONOGRAPH NEEDLES which prove to be instruments of excruciating torture . . . An old CASTLE in Scotland which is the scene of strange happenings and brutal murder . . . A JAPANESE DAGGER named Sammy, belonging to Colin Ogilvie, thrust deep into the heart of a man . . . An ARTIFICIAL LEG, the disappearance of which puts an old man at the mercy of his captors . . . A daring CROSS-COUNTRY CHASE in which the same person is both hunter and hunted . . . A curious SPIRITUAL SCHEME which threatens the lives and happiness of thousands of innocent persons.

Wouldn't You Like to Know—

- Who are the mysterious *they*?
 - Who is the mysterious Zillah? And what is Christian Retrospect?
 - How a vacation proves to be a murderer's undoing?
 - Why, in the train compartment, Colin had to cosset the passionate Avril Trent until she fell asleep?
-

YOU will learn the answers in this fast-paced murder tale as you breathlessly follow Colin Ogilvie from Cairo to the "House of Darkness" in Scotland—with excitement, suspense, and perilous adventure along the way.

MYSTERY—ACTION—SUSPENSE

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HOUSE OF DARKNESS

By ALLAN MACKINNON

Author of "Money on the Black," etc.

Author's Dedication—

This book is affectionately dedicated
to MRS. A. M. HORN who has known it
since it was only a chapter.

DELL PUBLISHING COMPANY

George T. Delacorte, Jr., President

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Helen Meyer, Vice-President

261 Fifth Avenue

Printed in U.S.A.

New York 16, N. Y.

DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY WESTERN PRINTING & LITHOGRAPHING COMPANY

HOUSE OF DARKNESS

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House of Darkness

Prologue

EVE OF A HEARTY BREAKFAST

THE NIGHT BEFORE they hanged him, he became more friendly; and, for the first time since the trial, seemed willing to talk to someone.

His audience was the chaplain, a rose-colored young man whose sense of his own sheer uselessness had been steadily growing during the three previous weeks. This, however, was better. All attempts at spiritual consolation had failed miserably, but here at last was something he *could* do—he could listen sympathetically. He adjusted his face to the correct professional expression and tried to keep his eyes from straying morbidly to the prisoner's neck.

"D'you realize, Padre," said the prisoner, "that I'm going to die tomorrow for the last, and least interesting, of nine cold-blooded murders?"

"Nine?" The chaplain was startled. "But—but surely—"

"Nine it is, Padre, though the earlier ones weren't mentioned in court. The first—it's years ago now, but I remember it very clearly—the first was a messy, amateurish affair. In a wood; in the dark. Ignored, I am glad to say, by one and all—except perhaps his widow, if he had one. I never knew—never knew his name, even."

The chaplain was speechless. This, he felt resentfully, was one of the occasions when there is nothing in the book that helps. The unshaded light glared down, and the two warders in the corner started their hundredth hand of cribbage.

"Numbers Two to Eight," said the prisoner, "were a different story altogether. Being, shall we say, 'translated' in bulk, as it were, they attracted attention. The authorities took cognizance. They noted the mass slaughter and

recorded it. They went further. They gave me the Military Cross."

Relief flooded the chaplain's pink Anglican features. "Ah!" he said, "but that was in the war!" The prisoner grinned sardonically.

"Yes, Padre," he said, "that was in the war. But—correct me if I'm wrong—I've never heard that the Sixth Commandment was suspended for the duration."

"Killing in wartime," said the chaplain unctuously—this one *was* in the book—"is quite a different matter from murder."

"Yes?" The prisoner's smile was distinctly mischievous. "Such as how?"

"Murder—the slaying of a fellow being for a personal end—that is one thing: an evil thing. But to kill in defense of the right, of one's home, of one's loved ones, of one's native land—well, you referred me to Scripture a moment ago. I think you'll find many instances there where God blessed the armies of His people and exalted the warriors who fought for His cause." The chaplain smiled the prim smile of one who has neatly made his point and wished that he could recall a particularly apt verse from Second Samuel which would have clinched the matter.

The prisoner, however, seemed unimpressed by his dialectical defeat. "All right, Padre," he said, "let's agree that it's a good thing to kill for your country—"

"A necessary evil."

"A necessary evil, then—and a bad thing to kill for yourself. Do you suppose for one moment that I killed those Japs because they threatened the security of England and Democracy and the Four Freedoms? Not on your life. I killed them because they had a variety of precision weapons trained on a defile I had to cross. I killed them, Padre, because, if I hadn't, they'd have killed *me*."

There was a brief silence. The older warder shifted a peg on the board and started to shuffle the cards. The chaplain felt suddenly unreal, as if everything that was

happening outside his head were slightly off pitch and out of focus. But the prisoner was intent on his argument.

"Now," said he, "contrast that with my crime, as the state elects to call it: the killing that's brought me here. My motive, believe it or not, *was* patriotic. But put it at its lowest—say I killed to save my own hide, just as I did in Burma. Does that get me a bar to my M.C.? It does not. It makes me a prominent, because transient, member of your flock. What's the answer, Padre?"

The chaplain shook his head and tried to snap back to normal. There was an answer, he knew, and a very good one, but for the life of him—"Oh, my friend," he ad-libbed, "we must not set ourselves—"

"I know you didn't," said the prisoner. And then, abruptly, his composure broke and sheer naked worry showed on his face. "Padre," he said urgently, "how long does it take?" Unconsciously, he was fingering his neck.

"How long does what take? I don't—er—"

"The—the hanging. They come into the cell—in here—and tie your arms. Don't they? Three leather thongs. I read that somewhere. And then—then you go out. The—the execution shed's just outside, isn't it? The trap and the—the—" He stopped, and swallowed. Three drops of sweat stood out on his forehead. "How long does it all last, Padre?" he whispered.

"I—I don't know," said the chaplain. He had never felt so appallingly inadequate in his life before. "You see, this is the— Well, actually I've never— This is my first—"

For a moment the prisoner's face looked ghastly. Then, with an effort that could be felt, he leveled his breathing and even recaptured a vestige of his earlier grin. "Your first hanging, Padre?" he said. "Mine too. I wonder which of us will stand up to it best?"

At five o'clock in the morning he gave up the pretense of sleep and asked for the wherewithal to write. It was brought him—an envelope and two sheets of blue gov-

ernment paper, a bottle of scarcely bluer government ink, and a battered government pen. He sat for a minute chewing the end of the pen. Then he began to write.

Dear Ogilvie,

I don't know why I'm writing—to you, of all people—save that I feel, in this last hour or two of life, a need for company. By which I don't mean warders or parsons.

He glanced with distaste at the two grim figures in the corner of the cell—they had relieved the cribbage players at midnight—dipped his pen in the watery ink, and continued:

Though you probably did more than any other man to put me in here—though you stand for all I hate and detest, and in turn detest all I believe in—yet somehow I cannot dislike you personally. (But I must confess to a malicious hope that your grateful country will give you an O.B.E. or something for your great national services! I'd laugh at that, even in—where I'm probably going.)

After all, it was the sheerest chance that you did what you did. If you had not happened to be in Cairo the day you were—if Claire Veness had not fallen for you as she did—if there had not been mist that night in Morvern—if half a hundred even chances had turned the other way, then I should not be writing this letter, and England would be a far happier country than she is. I've seen enough of the miseries of war and Big Power politics to know that that, at least, is true.

All right, you've won. But let me give you a word of warning. You may have "saved" England this time. But there will be a next time. And a next. And a next. I shall be dead, but there are others who feel as I do—thousands of others. And they are very much alive. And one day they're going to win.

He sat back and read it over; then, without salutation, signed it. The envelope he addressed to Colin Ogilvie,

Esq., The Absentees Club, Jermyn Street, London, W.1. He folded the letter and tucked it away, leaving the envelope open. Then he glanced toward the small, high window of the cell, and for a moment panic seized him. For the little square of darkest blue had faded to the eggshell tint of sunrise, and he knew that his time was near. Drawing a long, deep breath, the prisoner made the biggest effort of his life; and won.

"I wonder," he said slowly, but without a tremor, "if you chaps would post this for me? I'd gladly do it myself, but"—a faint, faint grin—"I've got to hang around here."

Chapter One

QUIET NIGHT IN CAIRO

THERE IS A POPULAR and not ill-founded belief that, if you really want to start something, Cairo is the ideal place to do it. And certainly this story starts in Cairo, on the terrace of the Continental Hotel, on a sweltering Friday night in June. It started, to be precise, two minutes after the grinning Sudanese waiter had brought Colin Ogilvie his third brandy, and from then on it moved fast. So let us use this brief lull to study Mr. Ogilvie.

He was a very large young man with a roundly innocent face, short, fair hair, and the honest blue eyes of a killer: though that was no longer his trade. The war, snatching him from St. Andrews University and the moral certainty of becoming a schoolmaster, had turned his life upside down for six years and eventually discarded him in Bombay.

Having handled the Nepalese sepoy with some success, Colin had no doubts of his ability to control schoolboys. But the prospect of proving it attracted him not at all. Eventually, of course, he would go home and settle down to domesticity, to the humdrum routine of teaching. Eventually. But for the present— Well, there were slower and more amusing ways of reaching Britain than by troopship.

He blued his rather ridiculous gratuity in four memorable Bombay nights, said good-by to the lady on Malabar Hill whose co-operation had made such speed possible, and moved down to Goa to take passage in a dhow bound for Basra. The British ratepayer had spent a lot of money training him to achieve things the hard way, and he saw no reason to write off that outlay yet awhile.

In the months that followed he drifted happily from place to place and from odd job to odder. As a storeman

—temporary—to B.O.A.C. at Ma'quil, he was quite respectable. As deckhand in a high-pooed fishing smack at Bahrein he was much less so. And there were other and even less seemly incarnations.

A long time passed, however, with interest if not with profit, and Colin was seriously considering a return to England, home, and duty when he ran into the Pankaley Archaeological Expedition. It consisted, when he met it, of Mr. Pankaley himself, drowning his sorrows in the Semiramis Bar in Bagdad. Mr. Pankaley, it appeared, had just come from the airport after sending his second and last European colleague home sick, and was feeling less than equal to the task of carrying on alone. An hour's drinking produced the obvious solution and next morning the two set off in a battered station wagon for Ur of the Chaldeas. En route Colin, now second-in-command of the expedition, heard for the first time of Sumerian and proto-Akkadian culture, of plano-convex bricks, and Kassite boundary stones; learned with considerable surprise that the Flood—Noah's one—had actually happened; and reflected with some relief that he had succeeded in stalling domesticity for a further half-year.

When digging ceased for the summer he said good-by to Pankaley, counted his money and found it adequate, and joined a providential camel train that was heading for Lydda. It was a final fling, for by this time he had really made up his mind to go home. And having done so, it was characteristic of him that he used the quickest means. From Lydda he flew to Cairo, where he straightway booked a passage in the next day's plane for England, and only then sought a hotel and settled down for a quiet night. Which brings us back to the Continental Terrace, the third brandy, and the start of the story.

Sipping his drink, Colin gazed with genial approval at the passing show. Against the solid blackness of the Egyptian night the garish neon lighting seemed to make everything stand out preternaturally clearly.

Sleek, shiny cars hustled lethargic horse cabs. Sleek,

shiny men squired chic, well-rounded women. Egyptians mingled with French, Armenians, Persians, Italians, Greeks. At the next table a gilly-gilly man was delighting two Englishmen. Across the road a shoe-shine boy was ruining an American's boots with that extremely corrosive acid peculiar to his trade. And over all rose the incessant, deafening din that is the voice of Cairo.

How, Colin wondered, would one symbolize this fantastic city? What single feature was most peculiar to it? Its skyline?—a medley of minarets, apartment blocks, aerials, and laundry? Its multiplicity of nations? He had counted, in less than a hundred yards of the Sharia Soliman Pasha, shopowners of nine distinct races. Its excellent surrounding roads? Its vivid color? Its intransigent students? Its noise? Its prices?

All were well in the running, but he had finally decided on a photofinish for motor horns and 38-inch busts, when a hand touched his shoulder and a voice said, "Well, sink me if it's not Colin Ogilvie!"

Colin looked up quickly and saw a slim, dark youth in unobtrusively well-cut clothes. He rose to his feet, beaming. "Jerry, you old crook," he said enthusiastically. "Sit down. Have a drink. By gosh, I'm glad to see you! It must be—Lord—"

"Tamu, in '44," said Jerry Gray, "and not a minute less. Look, Colin, we must get together tomorrow and have a yarn, but right now I've got to fly. Let's say lunch at the Auberge about—"

"Sorry. No go. I've got to fly too—literally—fly home."

"Tomorrow morning?"

"Early."

For a moment a curious expression touched Jerry Gray's eyes; he looked, Colin thought, as if a tremendous weight had rolled off his mind. But he frowned nonetheless as he glanced at his watch, and there was humorous despair in his voice as he spoke. "Ah, well," he said, "I'm so late already that I don't suppose another few minutes will make much difference." He sat down, clapped his hands, and told the fez-topped waiter to bring two more

brandies. "And now," he said, "reveal all! What are you doing in Cairo, and what has the sometime Pride of the Gurkhas been up to in quiet civilian years?"

Colin gave a short summary of his wanderings and, signaling to the Sudanese to refill the glasses, questioned in his turn. Jerry, it seemed, had gone back to his prewar job in the London office of an Anglo-Egyptian trading concern; had been offered a transfer to Cairo; had grabbed it; and was now doing excellently well in that cosmopolitan capital. "Mark you," he said, "there are moments when you suddenly realize that a piaster's *not* the same as a penny, and get faintly overcome at the sight of your expense sheet, but, for all that— Oh, it's not too bad. I wish you were staying for a few days, Colin. Still— Tell me, d'you ever hear of any of the fellows?"

Colin shook his head. "Not a word," he said. "I've been rather out of touch, of course. Have *you* met any of them?"

"One or two," said Jerry, and there was something in his voice—a sense of strain, almost—that made Colin look up sharply. Was he imagining things or had the atmosphere become suddenly tense? "Remember—remember old Bill Craddock, my company commander?" Jerry was watching him with an urgency that the question scarcely seemed to justify.

But a wave of pleasant anticipation was surging through Colin's soul, and he smiled reassuringly. His instinct had been right—he had *not* been imagining things. There *was* something odd going on, and now he was going to be let in on it. Bill Craddock, indeed! He himself was the only company commander Jerry Gray had ever had, and they both knew it. "Old Bill Craddock, eh?" he said warmly. "Of course I do. Where is he now?"

The lines round Jerry's mouth relaxed. "Canada," he said cheerfully. "A good bloke, old Bill. Remember that lovely crack of his when we were retreating to Imphal—running like blazes with half a million Japs one jump

behind? And old Bill just grinned and said, 'Don't look now, but I think we're being followed.' Remember?"

"I do indeed," said Colin happily. So that was it! Somewhere around—and every instinct in his Celtic body confirmed the coded meaning of Jerry's speech—somewhere around was a follower—a listener—a threat. Who, where, what, and why he had still to learn. And clearly, as Jerry thought their conversation was being overheard, he was not going to learn here. Wherefore—

"Remember that other crack of his?" he asked. "When the havildar asked for leave the day we were ordered forward?"

"Don't remember that." Jerry was playing up in turn. "Must have been after I went to G.H.Q."

"I believe it was." Colin mustered his half-forgotten Urdu and framed his message. "Anyway," he said slowly, "this havildar came up and said, *Abhi ap yih boliyie ki ham ko jana parta hai. Jab ap rawana honge tab ham ap ke sath jaenge.* And old Bill said, *Agar ham jaldi jaenge to ham ko choti mauqa milegi jis men ham apas men batchit karsakenge aur ap ham ko samjhaenge 'ke bat kya hai!'*" It had been an effort, and there were probably a dozen mistakes in it. But maybe it would get across.

It did. Jerry Gray laughed heartily and, to all appearances, genuinely; which was a commendable feat, for the story was quite pointless. Linked together, the two Urdu speeches merely said, "Say you've got to go, and I'll walk a bit with you. If we move fast, we'll have a chance to talk, and you can tell me what it's all about."

Tapering his laugh to a convincing finish, Jerry looked at his watch and leaped to his feet. "Colin, I'm sorry," he said, "but I really must go."

"I'll walk a bit with you. Or are you taking a taxi?"

"Not worth it. I'm only going along to the Badia."

"Come on, then." Colin rose as he spoke, and the two strode down the steps and into the crowd at a rate of knots. As they went, a small, swarthy man with a drooping cheek rose hurriedly from a near-by table.

Colin memorized him and swept on, listening, for

Jerry was talking fast.

"As soon as you hit England, get hold of Sir Alan Drexter at the Home Office. His department's called S.C.O.2."

"Drexter, S.C.O.2."

"Right. Give him this message personally. My normal line of communication has been tapped. They're on to me, and I'm going to lay off for a while. But—this is the important bit, Colin—Sewell went to Mena this afternoon and spent five hours at Zillah's house. There was a conference—half a dozen of them—but the only other chap I got a glimpse of looked like Manling, the M.P. May not have been, but looked like him. Got all that?"

"Your communications are N.G. and you're pulling out. Half-a-dozen people, including Sewell for sure and Manling maybe, conferred with Zillah this afternoon. *Thik?*"

"*Thik hai.*"

"Personal for Drexter. What happens if I can't get hold of him? Anyone else do? This is the week-end, you know."

"Blast! So it is. Well, at a pinch, his deputy—Colonel Stanley. But do your best to get Drexter."

"Right. One other question. Who is Sewell, who is Zillah, and what's it all about? You Secret Service or something?"

Jerry grinned. "I don't think we *have* a Secret Service," he said. "Anyway I'm certainly not in it. No, this is simply"—the pause was almost imperceptible and his tone was unchanged as he went on—"—simply not your type, old boy. I'd ask you like a shot but I know they'd bore you."

"Right ho," said Colin equably, scarcely glancing at the little man—swarthy, with a drooping cheek—who had popped up by his elbow. "I've got an early rise anyway. I'll get along to bed."

"Good man," said Jerry, and stopped. "By-by, Colin, and a safe trip home. I'm due for leave at Christmas, so we must get together."

"We'll do that. The Absentees Club in Jermyn Street will always find me."

"Good. Till Christmas, then."

Ignoring the voluble appeals of a pockmarked *arbagi* whose taxi was miraculously disengaged, he strode off rapidly through the crowd.

"I'll be seeing you," said Colin.

It was a reasonable prophecy; but it was wrong. For even as the airliner bore him away from the next day's dawn, two straining *fellahin* were hauling from the muddy Nile what had been Jerry Gray. They were profoundly disgusted to find that its pockets had been rifled already.

Chapter Two

ABSENTEES IN JERMYN STREET

THE ABSENTEES CLUB, like others better known, caters mainly for the wanderer. Its membership is varied, enormous, and, fortunately, widely scattered. A former secretary once calculated that if all the members suddenly and simultaneously wanted a room for the night it would take a thousand and one nights to accommodate them. "And no Scheherazade to help pass the time either," he added, for the Absentees is one of that dwindling group of clubs that still bar women on any and all occasions.

But there is little fear of such a rush demand. Few of the members see England more than once in three or four years, and there are some (they get reduced terms after the first decade) who have not entered the club for a generation. So absent, indeed, are the Absentees, that the committee is elected quarterly instead of annually, on the excellent principle that any one able to serve for a continuous year is morally unworthy of membership.

Colin had joined when, as an undergraduate, he first took to spending his vacations in the less probable parts of Europe; and, in the best traditions of the club, had scarcely used it since. But as he had neither home nor relatives, it seemed the obvious base from which to reconnoiter the school-teaching world—and any other that offered—so he had cabled from Lydda to reserve a room. Accordingly when, late on Saturday evening, he arrived in London, it was to Jermyn Street that he ordered his taxi to take him.

Colin's mood had been steadily changing during the long, boring hours in the plane. First thing in the morning the mystery of Jerry Gray and the Man with the Drooping Cheek had looked like something out of Ambler or Buchan. But as the day aged his enthusiasm waned.

What, after all, had really happened? Jerry—who had always had a tendency, now he came to think of it, toward self-dramatization—had made a frightful hoolah about getting news of some conference or other to the Home Office. So what? Secret conclaves that affected the life of the nation were spied on by professionals, not by business executives in their spare time, and news of them was *not* channeled haphazardly through casual travelers. Nor was it normally sent to the Home Office. What, after all, was the Foreign Office for?

He did not for a moment doubt that Jerry thought the whole thing important. Probably it *was* important, at that—to Jerry. Probably Sewell and Zillah were big businessmen, trying to corner the market in whatever it was that Jerry's firm sold, and this Drexter chap was a director or something. Whatever the explanation, he felt pretty certain that the tidings he bore would cause no commotion in Whitehall, whatever they might cause in Cornhill. This conviction, for some reason, left him curiously flat.

The taxi dropped him at the Absentees, and as he paid it off, he wondered, not for the first time, why the ruggedly independent British cabby should expect an enormous tip, while his Egyptian counterpart—notoriously rapacious—expected none. It was all against national form, he felt—a complete turnup for the *Domesday Book*.

A club porter carried his bags indoors and led him, in due course, to a charming little room on the second floor. It was furnished in maple and green, with its own green-tiled bathroom attached, and its decorator had somehow achieved—was it by the delightful Berko head over the fireplace?—an atmosphere much more friendly than that of the normal public bedroom. Perhaps it was the bedside bookshelf, half filled with bright-colored paperbacks, that did it. Whatever it was, Colin reflected, this was no bad spot for a kinless loon to come home to. If only the menu and the wine list were as he remembered them. He was feeling considerably more cheerful by the time he had run his bath and stripped off his

travel-soiled clothes.

Fifteen minutes later, fresh, glowing, and hungry, he emerged from the bathroom, to find his room looking like the tail end of a bargain sale. Both his suitcases were open and empty. Their contents, crumpled, broken, or bent, according to their nature, lay strewn on bed and carpet. Every drawer in the room was open. The bed had been stripped and the mattress pulled half off it. Moving closer, he saw that the suitcases had not only been opened—they had been slit and slashed inside. So had the lining of the suit he had just taken off, and its pockets were inside out. Someone, he gathered, had been looking for something.

The porter answered his furious ringing, gave one horrified look at the wreckage, and ran for the secretary. Colin, waiting, started to dress. The line of his mouth was ugly and his eyes were hard.

Captain Stevens had been secretary of the club for eleven years. Tall, lean, and rather distinguished, with close-cropped hair and a dinner jacket that somehow contrived to look regimental, he could never have been mistaken for anything but what he was—a half-pay regular. You guessed, as soon as you saw him, that he had an account with Cox's, referred to Woolwich as "The Shop," and would eventually end his days in Cheltenham. And you were right: he had, did, and would.

Twenty years of the British soldier had somewhat immunized Stevens to shock, but even his rigid calm shook slightly at the sight of Colin's bedroom. "Good Lord, Ogilvie," he said, "what on earth has happened?"

"What does it look like?" said Colin shortly. "I was in my bath at the time, so I didn't hear anything."

"You wouldn't. Jove, they've been thorough, haven't they? How long were you out of the room?"

"Ten, fifteen minutes. Not more."

"Must have been two of them, then. No one man—Dash it, I admire their nerve. Did they find it—whatever it was?"

"Not knowing what it was," said Colin acidly, "I can't

tell you." He could feel his temper climbing away from him.

Captain Stevens looked at him quizzically. "Ogilvie," he said, "I may have spoken out of turn, and if so I'm sorry. But you're not trying to tell me that this was done by an ordinary second-story sneak thief, are you? These chaps were definitely looking for something they believed you had in your kit: something small—a letter or a jewel or something. A village copper could see that with one eye, so there's no point in ignoring it."

"There's no point in saying it either. What is the point is how in blazes can my room be ransacked by a couple of thieves at 10:30 p.m. in a properly organized club, and nobody know anything about it?"

"That," said the secretary grimly, "is something I'm going to find out tonight. Sergeant!"

"Sah?" The porter's monosyllable and the move to attention that accompanied it simply shouted "Guardsmen."

"Parade all the staff outside my office," said Stevens, "except essential duties, and arrange reliefs for those as and when I call them. I'll be down in five minutes."

"Sah!" said the porter, and went. Stevens turned to Colin.

"Look, Ogilvie," he said, "I know this is a shocking thing to have happen in your own club and I'm going to have someone's blood for it, but—well—you'll admit it's not quite the same as pilfering in the cloakroom. Trained searchers just *don't* take a risk like this in the hope of finding some petty cash. I've no desire to pry into your private business, but—"

Colin's anger dropped as suddenly as it had arisen. He grinned. "I've been darned rude to you, Stevens," he said, "and I apologize. No right at all to round on you like that. It's just—well, I hadn't expected this, and—"

Stevens grinned in his turn. "Forget it," he said. "Club secretaries exist to be rounded on, and this makes an interesting change from crumbs on the billiard table. Tell me, though, is it likely to happen again? I mean,

they won't come back to shoot you, or anything, will they? It's not that I object personally, but some of the more elderly members—"

Colin laughed aloud. "I don't think you need worry about that," he said, leading the way to the door. "I'm going downstairs now to do some hard-and-fast phoning and I think you can safely bet that the jinx will be off me in a couple of hours." Which was one of the most ridiculous underestimates he had ever made.

Quite obviously Sir Alan Drexter was unlikely to be at the Home Office at ten-thirty of a Saturday night, but it was fairly probable that his home number would be in the London area. It was. The directory located Drexter, Sir A., Bart., J. P., at an address in Lowndes Square. And in a few moments Colin was talking to an aged voice that announced itself as Sir Alan's butler.

"My name is Ogilvie, and I have a very important message for Sir Alan. Is he at home?"

"I'm afraid he's not, sir."

"Oh. When will he be back, do you know?"

"Not for some time, I'm afraid, sir. Sir Alan is out of town. He's on leave."

"Can you give me his present address?"

"I'm afraid I can't, sir."

"I can assure you that my business is official—and urgent."

"I'm sorry, sir, but you see Sir Alan hasn't got an address. He's at sea, sir—in the *Kestrel*."

"In the what?"

"His yacht, sir. He's cruising around the west coast *somewhere*, but where I don't know."

"I see." This was an unexpected snag and an annoying one. If Drexter was indefinitely unavailable, it looked as though Colin's news would be stale before anyone could use it. Then he remembered that Jerry had mentioned a deputy. "I wonder," he said, "if you know where I could get hold of Sir Alan's deputy—a Colonel Stanley, I believe."

This time he struck lucky. "Yes indeed, sir," said the

aged voice. "Colonel Stanley has a flat in Knightsbridge. His number is— Just one moment, sir. Yes, Kensington 1626."

Colin thanked him, hung up, and then dialed the Kensington number. There was no reply.

Feeling distinctly frustrated, he emerged from the booth. Things were happening—things violent, illegal, and mysterious—and he could do nothing about it because two blasted civil servants weren't there when he wanted them.

"Can I help you, sir?" It was the hall porter speaking.

"Yes, please," said Colin. "Ring Ken 1626 every ten minutes till something happens. Then let me know. I'll be in the dining-room."

The dining-room at the Absentees is perhaps the most interesting feature of that excellent institution. It has all the conventional fixings of the normal English club-room, though rather better done than most—dark paneling, gleaming tables, spotless linen, glinting silver, winking crystal—but it has something more, something as personal as the portraits in the Garrick, and much less usual. It has on its walls the triple-distilled and quint-essential cream of a century's souveniring by thousands of professional voyagers.

Dismiss rapidly any mental image of carved tusks or devil masks, Thibetan daggers or shrunken Inca heads, coins of the Pharaohs or green eyes of little yellow gods. Such things have been offered by optimistic members and politely declined. To get something "on the line" at the Absentees is much less easy than inducing the Royal Academy to hang your small son's water colors. Only the best, and the best of the best, is good enough. And as the years pass and the walls fill up, that best becomes increasingly hard to attain. Indeed the recent would-be donor of a rejected Posada broadsheet is on record as saying, "Nowadays you've got to give 'em a piece of the True Cross or an autographed photo of the Indian Rope Trick. They've got everything else."

When Colin entered the room, it was almost empty.

He sat at one of the little wall tables, under an exquisite written picture, on silk, of the Padma Samthora, and picked up the menu and the wine list. They *were* as he remembered them. With a deep sigh of infinite contentment he gave himself over to the lusts of the flesh.

With the trout and the Montrachet, he began to consider the position: summarizing his facts and his inferences. Jerry had given him a verbal message for a Home Office official. Jerry, at the time, was being followed and knew it. Jerry and he, therefore, had put on an act calculated to convince the watcher that they were former wartime friends, but certainly not current colleagues. And it had worked. As nobody had gone through his kit in the Continental, They—whoever “They” were—had obviously taken him at his face value—so far as Cairo was concerned. But less than 24 hours later, two thousand some hundred miles away in London, they *had* gone through his kit; and they could only have been searching for something—a report on that Zillah conference, perhaps—that they thought Jerry had given him.

All of which (he had passed to the ham steak and the Chateau Margaux by this time) added up to two conclusions:

(a) The business was more serious than he had thought at first.

(b) “They” were extremely well organized.

A slight worry crept in at that point. Knowing nothing of the *fellahin* and their grim find, he had naturally given no thought to such a possibility. But now he began to wonder. Was Jerry all right? Because, if he was, what could have caused “Them” to change their minds about Colin’s innocence? *Something* must have happened between 10 p.m. Friday and 10 p.m. Saturday. What? And had it happened to Jerry?

As he savored the last mouthful of the Stilton a clock somewhere began the elaborate routine of striking midnight, and the hall porter appeared again. “Still no reply, sir,” he said. “Er—I go off duty now, but—”

“Don’t worry about it. It can wait till morning.”

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir."

"Good night," said Colin, and laid his napkin on the table. He would forego the coffee and the Courvoisier. He felt suddenly tired.

Tomorrow, he decided as he climbed upstairs, he would get hold of Colonel Stanley braw and early and get this thing straightened out. It was beginning to worry him.

At seven o'clock of a flawless June morning a servant brought him tea; and at seven-one a straightforward, no-nonsense knock heralded Captain Stevens. He was dressed in a neat Glen Urquhart that struck the happy mean between town and Sunday and he looked as if he had already done a couple of hours' work. He accepted the invitation to sit down.

"I've found out what happened," he said, "but there's no hope of tracing the blokes. Can't get any sort of a description worth two hoots."

"What did happen?"

"Wretched boy in the kitchen. Only been here three weeks. I questioned him till he broke down and told me all about it. It appears that two men—he called them gentlemen, but I doubt that bit—anyway, these two fellows approached him yesterday afternoon when he'd slipped out of the back door for a smoke: said they were very anxious to photograph some of our museum pieces in the dining-room and the library, but as they weren't members they couldn't get in. Instead of referring them to me, the little fool took their money—couple of quid, I gather—and agreed to let 'em in by the cellar entrance provided they promised not to implicate him if they were caught."

"But that was the afternoon. Don't tell me they stayed in the club till half past ten without anyone—"

"Oh no. They didn't go in in the afternoon—just made the arrangement for nighttime. Said they'd have to go and get their cameras, and anyway they'd better leave it till pretty late, when the dining-room and the library

would be empty. Fatuous story. Don't know how the little fool believed it for one minute—if he really did."

"Well!" said Colin. "So that's how they worked it? And they knew, while I was still a thousand miles from England, that I was going to spend the night here? Well, well, well!" He sipped his tea thoughtfully. Stevens rose to his feet.

"I'm not particularly proud of my staff," he said, "but I thought I'd better tell you the whole story."

"Thank you. I'm glad you did. It's given me quite a lot to think about."

Stevens smiled sardonically. "I'd a feeling it might," he said. He moved toward the door, then paused. "Oh, by the way," he said casually, "just one more point. D'you propose reporting this to the police? Or would you rather—er—"

"Yes, of course," said Colin; and then paused. After all, what did he know about the business? It might well be one of those things—he had been around sufficiently to appreciate how many of them there are—which are best dealt with unofficially. And if so, any premature publicity from him might spoil everything. On second thought, he would wait till he had spoken to this Colonel Stanley.

"No," he said, "perhaps not. I can't decide, really, till I've—well, for an hour or two. Do you mind?"

"Not in the least," said Stevens. "Personally, I'd rather keep it quiet—better for the club, and I think I'm quite capable of dealing with that wretched brat myself." He nodded and went out. Colin, moved by a sudden resolution, got up and started to shave.

Remarkably few minutes later he entered the phone booth in the hall and dialed Stanley's number. It seemed to ring forever, and he was on the point of hanging up when a very sleepy but very attractive feminine voice said, "Hullo."

"Is that Kensington 1626?"

"Mm?—Oh!—Yes."

"May I speak to Colonel Stanley, please?"

There was a pause. Then, "He isn't here," said the voice, and yawned hugely. Colin gritted his teeth.

"Would you kindly tell me where he is then?" he asked.

"He's at home."

"Isn't that his home?"

"Yes, of course it is, but it's not"—another yawn—"the home he's at just now. I say, can you tell me the correct time? My watch has stopped at half past seven."

"The correct time," said Colin grimly, "is half past seven! For heaven's sake, woman, will you wake up!"

There was another pause, but this time the voice when it came back had lost all trace of sleep and had gained an edge like icicles. "Who is that speaking?" it asked dangerously.

"My name is Ogilvie, and I want to get in touch with Colonel Stanley. Urgently."

"And do you feel, Mr. Ogilvie, that being rude over the telephone is the best way of getting results?"

"Listen, Miss Whoever-you-are, I'm in—"

"No, Mr. Ogilvie, you listen to me! It may be your custom to ring people up in the small hours of the morning, but insomnia's no excuse for rudeness. If you want Colonel Stanley you can ask for him civilly."

"Ye gods! Has he been there all the time?"

"I said 'civilly,' Mr. Ogilvie."

Colin held his breath, refrained by an effort from hitting the telephone, thought of Jerry Gray's urgency, and exhaled slowly. "May I please," he said humbly, "speak to Colonel Stanley?"

"I'm afraid he's gone down to the country for the week-end," said the voice brightly. "I can give you his phone number if you like."

"I should be grateful."

"He's at St. Leonards 3406. St. Leonards-on-Sea, in Sussex, that is."

"Thank you. If I ring him now, do you think I'll get him?"

"If you ring him now," said the voice, "I should

think you'd get hell. And rightly. You—you Scotch night-hawk!" A click indicated that Woman had had the last word.

Colin replaced the receiver slowly and breathed for a moment or two like a man who is about to swim a length under water. But he was grinning as he came out of the booth. After all, seven-thirty was the heck of a time to call anyone on a Sunday morning in England. The trouble with him, he'd been abroad too long; he had forgotten the national decencies. Besides, her voice had really been extremely attractive. A blond sort of voice, he felt, about five foot five, with dark eyebrows. Obviously she had got out of bed to answer the phone. He wondered what she had been wearing. It was very hot weather—

And maybe her advice about ringing St. Leonards had been sound. Another hour or so might well make his first contact with Colonel Stanley more pleasant than it otherwise would be. He decided to have breakfast before calling the gallant colonel.

Yes, he thought, as he poured his coffee and then balanced the *Observer* against the coffeepot, she really had had a most attractive voice. Thirty-six bust, twenty-five waist, and thirty-seven hips perhaps; with small feet. Age twenty-two. And fair, fair, wonderfully fair skin. It was a long time, he reflected, it was a very long time indeed, since—Gosh, it was years! So many years, in fact, that any voice that spoke English and wasn't positively tenor or baritone was bound to sound marvelous. Probably she was fifty and looked more. He turned firmly to the *Observer*.

And there, in due time, the word "Cairo" caught his eye, and he read of the murder of Jerry Gray. For murder it clearly was. *The nature of the injuries, said Reuter, suggests that he may have been knocked down by a car before being robbed and thrown into the river.*

So "They" had got Jerry! Right after he'd left him, probably—perhaps by the very *arbāgi* who had been shouting the odds as they parted—Jerry had been run

down and killed. A quick surge of red anger almost choked him before it faded to the cold, dangerous hate of the Celt. And, though he did not even phrase the vow in his own mind, Colin resolved in that moment to exact a heavy payment in kind.

But why—his brain was working with cold clarity now—why had they *killed* the poor devil? Murder was a risky business, even in Cairo. So why kill a man who had already shot his bolt as a menace to their plans? Answer, because they didn't know at the time that he *had* shot his bolt. They had killed him to prevent his passing on the news of the conference at Mena. But yes, of course. "They" clearly believed that Jerry must have put his news in writing, ready for transmission to England by whatever means he used. Therefore, when they searched his body and found no such report, they concluded that he must somehow have contrived to pass it on already. And as they had obviously been tailing him every minute of the day, it would be an easy step from there to the conclusion that the report had probably been passed to Colin. Hence the burglary of the previous night, which had presumably satisfied them that he was *not* involved after all. He smiled grimly, then rose and made for the phone booth in the hall. Colonel Stanley would just have to be wakened early. This was too serious a business to wait on etiquette.

It took three minutes to get through to St. Leonards, and a further thirty seconds to bring the colonel to the phone. He had a crisp, clean voice which Colin liked immediately.

"Stanley here. Who is that?"

"My name's Ogilvie, sir. You don't know me, but I've got a message for you from Jerry Gray."

"Jerry Gray, eh? Seen the papers?"

"Yes sir. And now I think I ought to see *you*. At once."

"So do I. Where are you?"

"London. But I can come right down."

"Good. There's a nine forty-five from Victoria that gets you here reasonably quickly. Book to Warrior

Square Station and then get a taxi to take you to The Chesters. He'll know it. I'd meet you, but as we've never met we might miss each other and waste time."

"Right, sir," said Colin, and hung up.

With over an hour to kill, he decided to walk to Victoria. It was a glorious morning, warm, but not too warm, bright, but not with the early brightness that so often precedes rain. Piccadilly, as he strolled along it, was practically deserted and looked all the better for it. He bought a *News of the World* outside Green Park Tube and then turned into the park to walk to Grosvenor Gardens.

He was idly watching a dapper little black-and-tan mongrel fruitlessly chasing sparrows off the grass and wondering how Colonel Stanley could best be induced to let him in on the next bit of action, whatever it was, when he suddenly felt an old, familiar tingling at the back of his neck. Colin had been long enough in uncivilized places to know what that meant. He was being followed.

He was being followed. So apparently the barren search of his belongings had *not* convinced "Them" of his innocence! Or were they just covering all possible bets? Were they merely watching him on general principles or did they still believe that he was a threat to their security? And if so, would they try to meet this threat as they had met the last one?

It looked, Colin reflected with a certain grim satisfaction, as if he might not after all require Colonel Stanley's permission to get in on the next bit of action.

Chapter Three

NINE FORTY-FIVE FROM VICTORIA

THE GREEN PARK was almost empty at that hour of a Sunday. Saving the little mongrel, the sparrows, and himself, Colin could see only one other living being—a woman who was coming toward him along the same narrow path he was following. He ached to look behind him, but he knew that, if he was to have a sporting chance at all—he did not underrate his opponents—“They” must not guess yet that he knew they were on his trail.

The woman drew nearer. She was wearing a navy suit with a Mayfair cut, and her snow-white hair, unhatted, had had a Mayfair “do” at no far distant date. But she walked at a far-from-Mayfair pace, with a stride that recalled his native hills rather than the gilded pavements of the West End. And she was carrying a dog lead. If only he could stop and talk to her! It would give him a chance to edge round and get a glimpse of whatever and whoever lay behind. But one cannot accost respectable strangers in London, even if they do walk like fellow Scots, and—the problem was solved for him. Five yards away the woman stopped and shouted to the little mongrel.

“Bats!” she called. “Bats! Come here, boy!”

Possibly because he was well trained, probably because every sparrow in sight was now airborne, the dog came trotting up, and—Lady Luck was dealing aces—he trotted straight to Colin.

“Hul-lo, old boy,” said Colin, and crouched to pat the little beast. Already he was at right angles to his route. One more turn would do it. “What breed is he?” he asked as the woman came up.

She laughed. “Battersea terrier,” she said in an accent that confirmed the origin of her gait. “He came from

the Battersea Dogs' Home and he's a wee mongrel. Aren't you, Bats?" The dog wagged his neat little tail in simple pride at the testimonial and put two white-spatted forepaws on Colin's arm.

It was exactly what was needed. Shifting one foot and sinking his chin onto the sleek black head, Colin looked back along the path he had just traversed. One girl with yellow pram—one elderly gentleman with spaniel—one ditto without spaniel but with silver-knobbed stick—one flanneled youth—one girl with red turban. That was all. It had taken only five seconds. He stood up.

"Nice little chap," he said, smiled, and moved gently on his way. The back of his neck still tingled.

Halfway down Grosvenor Gardens he made his second check. Stopping to tie one's lace, he decided, was too hackneyed; and there were no shop windows. But with a little ingenuity— Three paces later he pulled his handkerchief from his pocket. A box of matches came with it and fell to the pavement. He turned, stooped, lifted it rather clumsily, and went on his way. There had been no yellow pram, no spaniel, no flanneled youth, no red turban. But on the other side of the street an elderly gentleman was hirpling along with the aid of a silver-knobbed stick.

Victoria Station is fronted by a large forecourt—it is really a carriage way—on the far side of which is a bus terminus. Entrance to the station proper is gained by a number of wide arches which pierce the grey stone wall. And above, flanked by some undistinguished sculpture, is a clock. It indicated ten minutes past nine as Colin, watching for traffic with more than normal care, crossed the forecourt and entered the station.

He hurried to the booking office, bought a return ticket to St. Leonards, then strolled casually back to the forecourt. Here he gazed aimlessly at nothing in particular for thirty counted seconds, during which time he saw no sign of his follower. So, entering the station again by a different archway, he glanced over toward the booking office. The elderly gentleman, his silver-headed

stick under one arm, was standing there, looking rather bewilderedly about him. Colin turned away in time to avoid meeting his eye, waited till he was certain that he had been seen, and once again walked out into the forecourt.

This time, however, he went right across it, still watching warily for homicidal vehicles, and brought up at the bus terminus. Here he propped himself against a standard, hunched his shoulders, and did his best to look like a man who is prepared to wait indefinitely for the arrival of a friend. Less than a minute later the elderly gentleman came to anchor two standards away. He, too, settled down to wait. Apart from them Victoria was practically deserted.

The Ogilvie Plan for Confounding Shadows fell into three parts—Identifying, Confirming, and Challenging. Part One had been achieved at the booking office and Part Two here at the bus terminus. Remained Part Three—

At twenty minutes to ten Colin began to act, elaborately, the pantomime of one who suddenly realizes what time it is. He looked up at the clock, stiffened, and then, with a despairing glance toward the corner round which incoming busses turn, walked swiftly toward the station. Straight through the nearest archway he went, bore sharp left, and, as soon as he was round the corner, stopped. Gently he moved back along the wall and waited, like a cat behind a half-open door, at the corner round which he had just come.

He had not long to wait. Footsteps, hurrying, were crossing the pavement outside. The elderly gentleman, he reflected, was a good deal lighter on his feet than his appearance would—Steady! Here he came. Now! Colin stepped smartly forward from his cover and crashed his hundred and ninety-five pounds into the owner of the hurrying footsteps. She sat down abruptly.

In the horrified moment before he stammered his first attempt at apology he noticed several things. She was wearing, for instance, charmingly filled silk stockings

and, where they ended, a wisp of peach chiffon, over which she rapidly drew down the skirt of her light blue linen suit. She had no hat, and her face, framed by wavy golden hair, was the sort that only happens to other fellows—and in films at that—though its flawless perfection was marred at the moment by an expression of murderous fury. And her legs— But this is where we came in.

"I say," said Colin, abjectly, "I'm terribly sorry." He reached out a large hand, but she had scrambled to her feet before he could help her.

"You must be a riot in a china shop," she said acidly, dodged round his cringing bulk, and pattered off on her little white kid court shoes toward Platform 13.

Colin, all thoughts of elderly gentlemen driven from his mind, hurried after. She was about five foot three, he saw, and right in the center of her dainty little rump she bore a patch of gray Victoria dust. He had an insane desire to slap it off, but the guardian angel of his clan prevented that ultimate gaffe.

There was, however, no harm in telling her about it. She would probably, indeed, be grateful. He came up alongside.

"Excuse me," he said, "but there's some dust on your—er—you've been sitting on something dusty." Even as he said it he felt that, as dialogue, it lacked that sparkle. But there was plenty of sparkle in her eyes—green-flecked hazel, he noted—as she stopped and turned on him.

"I know I have," she said. "I can even remember doing it. A rogue elephant charged me, and there I was—sitting on something dusty." She eyed him from tanned forehead to sambur-hide shoes and her look would have withered a cactus. "Will you please," she said, "go as far away as you can in the shortest possible time and let me try to forget the whole sordid incident?" And for the second time in two minutes she pattered off.

But Colin, with the best will in the world—which he had not—could not comply. For to Platform 13 she was going, and from Platform 13 his train was going almost

any minute now. Therefore, giving her a ten-yard lead, he followed once again.

He caught up with her at the barrier and, while their respective tickets were being punched, essayed the softening possibilities of a smile. It was a twisted, rather whimsical, and wholly charming smile, cultivated originally to conceal a misplaced eyetooth, and retained through the years for its remarkable social success. But this time it might as well have been the leer of a Disney horse. Ignored, he watched her swing up the platform toward the front of the train; watched her so intently, indeed, that he walked into a stack of luggage and knocked it over. She turned at the noise, and, even at that distance, he could see the wealth of silent expression with which she looked at him. Rapidly he opened the door of the nearest compartment and stepped in.

There was a young couple in the compartment and they clearly resented Colin's intrusion. But, deep in his private troubles, he had no sympathy to spare for theirs. As the train started he opened his *News of the World* and very rapidly forgot his own peculiar antics in contemplation of the infinitely quainter ones of his fellow men.

The train bowled along uneventfully on its way south. At Lewes the young couple—still looking resentful—got out, and at Eastbourne a middle-aged man in rather audible tweeds got in. He sat opposite Colin, who immediately placed him as that familiar type, the Man Who Talks to Strangers in Trains.

Even as they started to move the newcomer went into action.

"A lovely day, sir," he boomed in the sort of voice that defeats the noisiest train. Colin nodded.

"The kind of day," said the other, "that makes one grateful that one was born into this green and pleasant land." Colin nodded again, turned his head, and gazed firmly out of the window at such parts of the green and pleasant land as the builders had left visible.

Apparently the rather obvious hint was effective for

he was left in peace for at least a minute. But then the booming started again.

"I'm going to ask you, sir, what may appear a rather curious question. It may even seem impertinent, though I assure you nothing is further from my mind. Are you—is your name, by any weird and wonderful chance, Ogilvie?"

"Yes," said Colin in surprise, "it is. But I'm afraid—"

His companion smiled goldenly and with obvious pleasure. "No sir," he said, "you don't know me. Evans is my name, but you don't know me. Nor do I know you."

"Then how did you know my name?"

The other smiled again. "By a very strange coincidence," he said. "I've got a photograph here." He felt in his breast pocket. "A group photograph, taken—this will surprise you, Mr. Ogilvie—"

It did. For he brought from his pocket, not a photograph, but a dull blue .38 Webley, and he pointed it straight at Colin's stomach. "Sit quite still," he said, and his voice had lost both its resonance and its friendliness. "Sit quite still. I want to talk to you."

A sick feeling of self-reproach swept over Colin. So they had outsmarted him after all! Laughing, no doubt, at the way he had accepted their red herring with the silver-knobbed stick, they had merely sent a man to Eastbourne to board the train, identify him, and stick him up. As easy as that. He felt disgusted with himself.

"About what?" he asked.

"I want to know the full contents of the verbal message you're carrying to Colonel Stanley."

"And if I don't know what you're talking about?"

Evans smiled, but now the gold teeth looked merely sinister. "I think you do know," he said.

Colin gazed out of the window for a moment. The train was fairly hurtling along so it was unlikely that there was a stop imminent. Evans seemed to read his thought. "We don't halt again till Cooden," he said, "so there's no point in stalling. I've got all the time I need."

Come through, Ogilvie! Exactly what are you proposing to tell Colonel Stanley?"

"What happens if I don't want to talk?"

Evans sighed, as at an importunate child. "You get shot through the liver and take four days to die," he said. "It's rather painful, I believe."

"And if I do talk?"

"You go free, of course."

Colin grinned wryly. "I'm not treating *you* as a fool," he said, "so please return the compliment. If I don't talk I get a slug in the liver. And if I do talk, in the heart, I suppose?"

Evans shrugged. "Or the head, if you prefer it," he said indifferently. "You're quite right, of course—you've had it. But unless you really *like* pain, I advise you to talk—and talk fast."

It all happened in less than a second. The racing train ran over a point, lurched, and for a moment jolted the Webley's muzzle off line. Before Evans could swing it back he found his wrist caught in an agonizing grip; and then a large fist traveled nine inches to the side of his chin, and he went out like a light.

Colin, breathing rather deeply, transferred the pistol to his jacket pocket and proceeded to bind the unconscious man with his own braces, suspenders, and shoelaces. Then he propped him up in the corner and slapped his face till the eyelids flickered and lifted.

"I'm not gagging you at the moment," he said, "because I think you might like to talk a little."

Evans said nothing but his eyes were eloquent.

"You might like," Colin continued, "to tell me who sent you to kill me, and where you're supposed to report afterward." Evans remained silent.

"On the other hand, of course, you might prefer to have a lighted match held under your nostrils. I don't know if you've ever tried that? It can't compete with a round through the liver, I admit"—as he spoke, he was taking matches from his pocket—"but for about seventeen seconds it's a pretty exquisite pain. And the second

match is worse for some reason. Probably because the top dressing's been burned off by that time. And after nine or ten—" He paused, for Evans's face had become deathly white, his lips blue. "Damn!" said Colin softly, for the signs were unmistakable. Even as he spoke, the man's head slumped forward in a dead faint.

"Who would have thought it?" Disgustedly Colin apostrophised the empty air. "Who would have thought the blighter could be as squeamish as all that? Ah, well! The better chance of getting something out of him when he comes to—if I don't scare him into an epileptic fit first."

But now the train, which had saved Colin's life a few minutes before, decided to support the opposition. It began to slow down, and, with Evans still a dead weight in his corner, pulled up at Cooden Beach Station. It suddenly occurred to Colin that if someone entered the compartment and found him with an unconscious man tied hand and foot, he was going to have some plain and fancy lying to do. And for a moment it looked as if two young women in summery prints *were* coming in; but, meeting his ferocious scowl as they approached the door, they sheered off and entered the next compartment. Shortly after which the train started.

But the threat had scared Colin, and he decided that he could not risk another station—at any rate with Evans in his present condition. There was a railway map of the area on the wall of the compartment, and from this he learned that the next stop, Bexhill, came immediately before his own destination, Warrior Square, St. Leonards. Beyond Warrior Square was only the terminus, Hastings.

A further thought occurred to him. If "They" were as well organized as they appeared to be, then the odds were that they would have someone waiting for him at Warrior Square in case the Evans mission miscarried—for instance, through failure to get Colin alone in a compartment.

The answer, therefore, became obvious. He dare not

sit in the train at another station and he dare not appear at Warrior Square, so the only possible course was to get out at Bexhill. Evans was still in his faint so, gagging him with the man's own handkerchief, Colin rolled him on to the floor and wedged him, not without difficulty, under the seat.

Two minutes later he stepped on to Bexhill platform and slammed the door behind him, praying that no one would open it before he was clear of the station.

A porter gave him his bearings, and he set off on foot in the direction of St. Leonards. It was a really wonderful day, and the salt tang in the air—the sea was only a stone's throw from the road—made shadowers, stick-ups, and sudden death seem very remote. Dearly would he have loved to surrender himself to Sussex, to walk till he had raised a pleasant thirst, and then to slake it in good English ale as a free man should. But he was not a free man—he was bound to the unavenged memory of Jerry Gray, and he had a job to do. He started to think about it.

Evans might be discovered at Warrior Square or he might be carried on to Hastings. Either way, the watcher at the station would know something had gone wrong when he, Colin, failed to appear, for presumably the first shadower, he of the walking stick, had warned all concerned that their quarry was safely aboard the train. What would the watcher do then? Well, he might do several things, but the chances were that the first of them would be a rapid move in the direction of The Chesters. His job, presumably, was to prevent Colin from meeting Colonel Stanley, and the easiest way to do that now was to watch Colonel Stanley's house.

What steps he would take when Colin appeared one could only guess. But, judging by Cairo, the Absentees, and the Evans incident, "They" suffered little from diffidence or inhibition, and it was quite on the cards that they would use methods no subtler than a rifle bullet or a fast-driven car. Colin decided that The Chesters, like Woman, should be approached without illusion,

trust, or warning.

He had been walking now for about half an hour, and felt that he must be near St. Leonards. A jovial man in corduroy slacks, exercising two spaniels, confirmed this, and added—a stroke of sheer good fortune—“If you carry on up to the top of the hill you’ll see a big house called The Chesters. That’s the start of St. Leonards proper.” Colin thanked him and carried on slowly. Halfway up the hill he stopped, for he could now see his objective quite clearly. The road was wide for a country one, and on its left or inland side ran a high wall which culminated, on the crest, in stone pillars. This, clearly, was the front entrance to the Stanley home, for beyond the wall, 50 yards back among a score of trees, stood what seemed to be a sizable Georgian villa. Almost opposite the stone pillars, on the other side of the road, was the more modest gateway of a smaller house, and just inside that gate was an enormous clump of rhododendrons.

Colin swung a trained eye round the landscape, and returned to the rhododendron clump. Yes. Failing a firing point at an upper window of some neighboring house—and surely even “They” could not have organized *that* in half an hour—the rhododendrons were the obvious cover from which to observe the entrance of The Chesters. He decided to do a little observation on his own account, unobtrusively.

The first part of the stalk was easy. After a casual glance around to assure himself that there were no visible spectators, he vaulted the right-hand fence and found himself in a field. Here he walked parallel to the road until he came to a garden—next but one, this should be, to that of the rhododendrons. He cleared the low wall and dropped down among some fruit bushes.

They offered scanty cover, but his luck held and he was unchallenged as he made his way to the far side of the garden, where another low wall separated it from the next. He looked over the wall into a wildly overgrown tangle of shrubbery, and it did not need the “For Sale” sign to tell him that here at least he ran no risks

from indignant householders. The rhododendron bushes were about 30 yards away, half left, and just this side of a weed-grown drive. Colin grinned a grin of pure delight, rolled over the wall, and began to move quite silently forward.

It took seven minutes to reach the clump, and three more to breach, soundlessly, its outer defense of blooms and branches. But, once inside in the hot gloom, he had his reward. Ten feet away, his face turned toward The Chesters and his back to Colin, was a man. He was down on one knee, resting an elbow on the other and leaning forward. His right hand hung by his side and it held a pistol. Colin began to inch forward over the dry earth.

It was slow and it was tense. But his quarry never turned. And at last, his muscles tired with the unaccustomed stresses, Colin found himself a foot away from his man. He paused there for a second or two, and pondered. Then a look that was sheer schoolboy came over his face. "Boo!" he said loudly.

The watcher emitted a startled squeal and swung round, to find himself firmly held, each wrist in an unbreakable grasp. "Looking for me?" asked Colin tenderly, and gave a double twist that threw the pistol a yard away and put its owner helplessly on his face with one arm bent up behind his back. Then, placing a heavy knee where it would hold the twisted arm most effectively, he slipped both hands round the straining neck and quietly choked the man into unconsciousness.

As he did so, Colin reflected that what he really needed was some organization for dealing with prisoners. First Evans and now this fellow had become the captive of his bow and spear, and he could hold neither of them. True, it would be easy to march the man into The Chesters—easy, and possibly fatal. For as no one swallow makes a summer, so one ambush does not necessarily make an entire defense system. For all he knew, the colonel's gateway might be under fire from half-a-dozen other hiding places; and he did not propose to make sure by walking through it.

The struggles had now ceased, so Colin turned his victim over on his back and looked at him. He was young, dark, and probably—it was hard to judge at the moment—handsome. His suit, a light gray cheviot, was rather too well cut, and his oyster silk shirt, smoke-gray foulard tie, and pearl tiepin were a poem in pastel. If you care for that sort of poetry. There was something almost devilish in Colin's grin as he took out his pocket-knife and opened it. "Poor little Beau Brummell," he murmured, as he proceeded to cut all the buttons off the perfectly creased trousers. "You're going to hate this more than if I'd shot you. But I haven't any rope, and you've got to be immobilized somehow or other for the next hour or two." Neatly he removed tie, handkerchief, and braces—yes, they too were gray—and, as a last thought, took the laces out of the hand-sewn suede shoes. Beau Brummell, he felt, would keep for quite a while. He pocketed the gun—it was a Luger with a silencer—and moved off.

To return down the hill through the two gardens and the field took only a couple of minutes, and Colin glanced at his watch as he swung over the fence and on to the road. It was just on half past twelve. So much for a pleasant Sunday morning at home.

There was a lane opening off the other side of the road, which clearly marked the boundary of Stanley's property, for the high wall continued to form one side of it. Colin walked swiftly across and proceeded to look for a likely place to climb over. Even with Beau Brummell out of the way he was taking no avoidable chances.

Fifty yards down the lane he found just what he wanted. The wall had crumbled a bit, leaving footholds, and a large elm on the other side, its branches overhanging the wall, offered an easy descent into the garden. Colin selected toe-and-finger space and went up.

The elm leaves obscured all view from the top, but one overhanging branch felt strong enough to bear him. If he could work along it to the trunk, he could then shin down in comfort. He took a firm grip on the branch

and swung off. There was a sharp crack, a crashing of leaves and twigs, and then he was falling through space. Somewhere, someone screamed. The branch had *not* been strong enough.

He landed on soft turf, rolled over unharmed, and leaped to his feet. He was in a little hedged-in rose garden, and five yards away, beside a rug and a heap of cushions, stood a girl. Her breast was heaving—presumably it was she who had screamed—and she seemed to have jumped up ready for instant flight. But as she looked at Colin her lithe body relaxed, and an unkind critic might even have said that she struck an attitude. Her expression was one of complete resignation. Also, Colin realized, it was familiar.

"Well!" she said, "if it isn't the Boy Tornado again! Don't look now, but you've been sitting on something dusty."

"Good afternoon," said Colin. It was not a very bright comeback, he felt, but this girl did something to his normal fluency. "I'm looking for Colonel Stanley."

"And you thought he might be nesting in that tree?"

"He's expecting me," said Colin. "My name's Colin Ogilvie." Now that he had time to study her, he realized that she had one of those figures that—well, it was one of those figures. Thirty-four, twenty-three, and thirty-five, perhaps. She was clad, to some extent, in brief white linen shorts. An emerald-green sun-top paid deference to the proprieties, but it was only a token payment. And she was shod with white *chaplis*. With mixed emotions he noted that her wedding finger was ringless.

He raised his eyes to her face again—it had struck him that the conversation was languishing—and what he saw there was disquieting. "Ogilvie!" she breathed. "Well, well, well! I might have known it!"

"I don't think—"

"I can well believe that. But you do talk, don't you? On telephones. In the middle of the night."

"Good heavens! Was that you I spoke to this morning?"

"That," said the lady, "was me. 'For heaven's sake, woman, will you wake up!' Remember?" She smiled with a dangerous sweetness.

Colin felt, vaguely, that fate could have arranged all this a lot better. As the start of a beautiful friendship, his first three encounters with this honey left much to be desired. "I'm extremely sorry," he said, "but my business *was* pretty urgent. And, incidentally"—he had suddenly noticed the weight of the two captured pistols in his jacket pockets, and it had jerked him back to the grim present—"it's even more urgent now. Can you tell me where Colonel Stanley is at the moment?"

"In his study, I imagine. You won't want to use the front door, of course, but there's some ivy you could fall off on to the porch. Then—"

"I wonder if you'd mind showing me where the house lies from here."

"—then you could hide behind the door and bowl him over when he comes to see what all the noise is about."

Colin took a deep breath. "It grieves me," he said, "to interrupt what is obviously the sweetest sound on earth to you, but I've got to see Colonel Stanley right away. How do I get out of this rose garden and which way is the house?"

"As to the first, I can only guess. Probably by diving through the hedge or trampling over—" She caught Colin's eye, and paused. He gazed meaningly at her gently rounded linen shorts.

"You are but ill-protected, woman," he said, "from what's going to happen to you in three seconds if you don't—"

Rapidly she backed away. "Follow me and I'll show you," she said hurriedly. "It's—it's round this way." Colin grinned and followed.

As they emerged from the little rose garden on to the springy turf of the main grounds he saw the house before him—a pleasant, solid building of the type they put up in the prefunctional days when architecture was an art as well as a science. He liked it.

He liked, too, the friendly way in which the girl waited for him and then walked by his side. She seemed to have dropped her act; and all trace of raillery had gone from her voice when she said, "I hope you're not going to worry Uncle Paul. He works so hard, poor darling, and he does love his Sundays."

"I'm afraid I'm going to worry him quite a lot," said Colin soberly.

The girl glanced quickly at his face and her voice became serious. "I'm sorry," she said. It might have referred solely to Uncle Paul, but he had a feeling that it included everything. She was rather sweet, he decided, when she wasn't being a smartypants.

"So Colonel Stanley's your uncle?" he asked.

"Not really. He's my guardian, and I've lived with him since I was nine. My name's Loring, incidentally—Kay Loring."

"And you live here? Or in town?"

"Here, mostly. Uncle Paul uses the Knightsbridge flat during the week, and I stay there, too, when I go up shopping, or for a dance or anything."

"Ah! And would I be correct in supposing that last night was one of the dancing nights?"

The girl smiled rather shamefacedly. "Yes," she said, "you would. I'd only been in bed about four hours when you phoned, so you see—"

"I eat dirt," said Colin as they stepped onto the wide gravel path and approached the front of the house.

Kay led him into a spacious hall and paused by the second door on the right. "This is the study," she said, and showed her head inside. "Uncle Paul, here's— Oh!" She emerged again. "He isn't there. I wonder if he's outside somewhere?"

"Was you looking for the colonel, Miss Kay?" An elderly woman in black came bustling forward from the far end of the hall. "He's went out."

"Gone out? But surely—" Kay turned inquiringly to Colin. "You're quite certain he *was* expecting you?"

"Quite. And he knew why I wanted to see him too. I

can't understand—"

"He had a phone call," said the elderly woman, "not half an hour ago, and then he went out."

"You've no idea where?"

"None at all, Miss Kay."

"Has he taken the car?"

"No, miss, he's on foot."

"Do you know who phoned him?" Colin asked.

The woman nodded. "Yes, sir," she said, "for the colonel was smoking in the porch, and I took the call. It was a Scotch gentleman—a Mr. Ogilvie."

Chapter Four

SUNDAY IN SUSSEX

FOR A MOMENT COLIN FELT utterly bewildered. And then the inevitability of the thing struck him. "They" were certainly thorough. At no cost must he and the colonel meet, so not only did they set two men to waylay *him*, they also spirited away the colonel—by means of a fake phone call made in his name! Those boys took very few chances.

"Thank you," he said, and flashed a silencing glance at Kay. "I expect he'll be back shortly. I'll wait, if I may."

"Of course," said Kay, and waved him into the study. "Thank you, Addison. I'll look after Mr.—this gentleman." The old woman bobbed and bustled away. The girl followed Colin into the room. "Well," she said, "what exactly does this mean?"

"I wish I knew," said Colin. "First and foremost, of course, that call didn't come from me. Someone—quite a lot of people, in fact—don't want me to meet your guardian, and they took my name in vain to get him out of the house before I should arrive."

There was fear in the girl's eyes as she looked at him, but her voice was steady. "What will they do to him?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," Colin lied readily. "I expect they've told him to wait for me somewhere—some hotel lounge or the like—and they hope I'll just go back to town when I find he's not here. There's nothing to worry about."

The girl gave him a pleading glance. "I'm twenty-three," she said, "which, allowing for our sexes, is about ten years older than you are. *Please* don't treat me like a child. What will they do to Uncle Paul?"

Colin studied her for a moment and decided to be brutal. "They may do anything at all," he said. "They've

already tried to kill *me* this morning." He pulled the two pistols from his pocket and dropped them onto a cushion. "These are the guns they tried to do it with."

The girl sat down suddenly on the arm of a chair. Her lovely little face had gone white and her eyes were wide as she stared at him. "I can't—believe it," she said.

"It may not be as bad as all that," he said consolingly. "No, I'm not spoon-feeding you—I mean it. I've got some information for the colonel, you see, and if they killed him I'd merely pass it on to someone else. So they'll probably only keep him out of the way till they've got rid of me, and then let him go. His death wouldn't help them at all, you see. I'm the game they're really after." He wondered if he had managed to sound convincing.

Apparently he had, and with a complication he had not foreseen. She was looking at him now with admiration.

"And you—you can take it as casually as that?" she murmured. Colin felt distinctly embarrassed.

"I don't propose to take it at all, if I can help it," he said. "If your guardian had to remain a prisoner till my death, believe me I'd be in no hurry to have him released. But of course he doesn't have to. He'll be rescued just as soon as we get this merry little bunch locked up—and I hope that won't be long."

"What are you going to do?" She was still looking at him with this embarrassing admiration. Colin grinned wryly.

"Not being the Saint or Slim Callaghan," he said, "I'm going to do something totally unheroic and extremely practical. With your permission I propose to call the police and sit here till they arrive." That, he felt, ought to finish the hero worship pretty effectively. But he reckoned without the Eternal Feminine.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad," she said, and there was more admiration in her face than ever. "I was afraid you'd try to do it yourself." Her eyes strayed to the two guns and returned to his. "And if you had, I think—" She stopped

abruptly.

"You think?" Colin normally knew a hit when he had made one. They had been not infrequent in his life, though he was still unspoiled enough to be genuinely surprised every time it happened. And this peerless girl was showing all the symptoms. He hated to be idolized, but this was a different emotion now—something much more tender—something he felt he would rather like. "You think?" he prompted.

"I think I'll put on some clothes while you phone the police." Miss Loring was herself again and the betraying moment was over. Maybe it had never existed anyway. Why should it? Why should she care about a man she had only just met? He was becoming conceited. Down, vain pride. Keep your mind on your business.

"D'you know the number?" he asked, rising as she got up and went to the door.

"St. Leonards 1113. Ask for Superintendent Brackett—he's a friend of Uncle Paul's. I'll be down in five minutes." She went out.

Superintendent Brackett was available and proved to have a bass voice of incredible rumbling depth. Colin announced that he was speaking on behalf of Miss Loring and went straight to the point. "Colonel Stanley left here half an hour ago in response to a phone call we have since proved to be faked," he said, "and I have reason to suspect foul play."

"What's your reason, sir?"

"The people concerned have been after me as well. With guns."

"You know who they are?"

"I don't. Colonel Stanley may—probably does."

"Where did they make the attempt on you, sir?"

"In the train coming down from Victoria this morning."

A muffled exclamation came from the other end of the line. "The nine forty-five would that be, sir?"

"It was. Why?"

"Well, sir, it so happens there was another outrage on

that train this morning—a jeweler held up and robbed. Might have been the same gang. Two dark, Spanish-looking fellows, was it?”

“No. There was only one and he was very English.”

“Dark, though?”

“Not particularly.”

“H’m. This Mr. Ogilvie, he said they were—”

“This Mr. *Who?*”

“Ogilvie. The jeweler. He—”

“Superintendent!” Colin would have interrupted an archangel at that moment. “Tell me only one thing. After they’d robbed him, did these dark Spanish chaps tie Mr. Ogilvie up with his own braces and shove him under the seat?”

He could feel the rush of suspicion that almost overwhelmed the superintendent. “How did you know that, sir?” asked the deep voice.

“Because,” said Colin wearily, “I am Mr. Ogilvie, and I’m *not* the man you’ve met. His name is Evans as far as I know, and I shoved him under the seat, because he was going to shoot me. I think the sooner we get together, Superintendent, the better.”

“That,” said the rumbling bass, “is the simple truth. Don’t leave the house till I come. Spanish chaps indeed. I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

Colin laid down the receiver and looked around him. It was a very pleasant room—comfortable, with the sort of comfort he liked: leather furniture, a big brick fireplace, one solitary picture—it was a Muirhead Bone—and one wall completely covered with books. He could be very happy in a room like this, he decided, and wondered, with a faint shudder, what sort of quarters they gave to junior schoolmasters these days. Still, that was as yet some way away. He could not, in decency, give up this present embroilment while “They” were a point ahead.

He was examining the bookshelves when he heard a car draw up at the front door. A moment later he heard a man’s voice in the hall, and Kay’s replying to it. That

would be the police. He went out.

It was not the police, but a thin-faced, tired-looking man of about fifty. He wore a sober blue lounge suit, horn-rimmed glasses, and that indefinable air that marks the professional man. Kay, now looking extremely attractive in a flowered silk frock with a square neckline, was obviously worried.

"No," she was saying, "no one phoned. When did it happen, Doctor?"

"Only a few minutes ago, I gather. As I say, I'm on my way there now and I told Mrs. Streatfield I'd pick you up en route. But she promised she'd ring you and warn you. I can't imagine—"

"We've been using the phone," Kay said. "Perhaps she tried to get through." She caught sight of Colin. "This is Doctor West," she said. "Uncle Paul's been hurt. Knocked down by a car."

Colin's mouth tightened and he thought of Jerry Gray. "Is he badly hurt?" he asked.

"I don't know." It was the doctor who answered. "I haven't seen him yet. It happened at Westfield, outside the house of one of my patients, and she called me over and suggested that I bring Miss Loring along with me, in case—" The unfinished sentence was somehow worse than the fatal words would have been.

"D'you want me to come with you, or shall I wait here for the police?" Colin asked. The doctor raised an interrogative eyebrow at the last word but asked no questions.

"You'd better wait. Doctor West can look after me, and—and—" Her voice faltered, and she hurried out of the door to the waiting car, the doctor following. Colin strolled slowly after and arrived at the door in time to hear his own name. It was the doctor who had uttered it.

"I wonder if you know a friend of the colonel's, a Mr. Ogilvie?" he was saying.

"Yes, I know Mr. Ogilvie."

"Then if you know where he is at the moment, perhaps you could phone him from Mrs. Streatfield's. Ap-

parently Colonel Stanley keeps asking to see him."

Explanations took ten seconds and, leaving a message with Addison for the superintendent, Colin followed Kay into the back of the doctor's Lancia just as it moved off. The doctor himself sat in front with the chauffeur.

They swung out of the great gateway, turned left, and ran due east for about half a mile. Then they struck a main road, turned northward, and really started to make time, the speedometer needle sitting comfortably on the seventy mark till the chauffeur slowed down for a T-junction. He took the left-hand turn, and Kay sat up suddenly. "This," she said, "doesn't take us to Westfield! This is the road to Battle."

The doctor turned in his seat, and his smile was not reassuring. Nor was the shiny black muzzle of the automatic he was resting on the back of the seat. "Yes, Miss Loring," he said, "this is the road to Battle—to battle, murder, and— You can probably complete the quotation yourself. You're going to join Colonel Stanley all right, but not in this neighborhood. Keep quite still, Ogilvie, or I'll shoot the girl first."

Colin let his body relax and sat back. "I'm sorry, Kay," he said bitterly. "This seems to be my day for buying Brooklyn Bridge from affable strangers. I wonder what bewhiskered trick I'll fall for next?"

"You won't fall for any more," said the doctor consolingly. "There won't be any need. You've caused us a lot of trouble, Ogilvie, and one or two of the boys are rather anxious to meet you again. Evans, for instance, wants to discuss matches and nostrils, I think. And young Roy Golding'll have a word or two to say about dress. He's got a knife, too, you know, though I doubt if he'll be content with cutting off a few buttons." His leer was an offense in itself.

Kay had said nothing throughout this conversation. Now, completely ignoring the doctor, she turned to Colin and laid her hand on his. "I'm terribly sorry, Colin," she said. "I got you into this mess."

"Nonsense," said Colin.

"Yes, I did. You thought I knew this man as Doctor West, didn't you? Otherwise you'd have been suspicious."

As a matter of fact Colin *had* thought just that, but he denied it. Kay merely shook her head, and continued to grip his hand.

This was highly pleasant, and in other circumstances Colin would have given her every encouragement, and more. But right now he wanted both hands free to seize any tiny chance that the fates might send him. So, mentally resolving to start again from there at the first opportunity, he gently laid her hand back in her lap. "The best thing you can do, my lass," he said, "is to relax. You'd a pretty late night last night. Why don't you get some sleep?"

As he said it, he wondered if the girl would miss—and, worse still, the doctor see—the purpose of his suggestion. But Kay was exceedingly bright, and the doctor, apparently, was not, for she lay back and closed her eyes, while their captor continued to loll over the back of his bucket seat without, however, easing his watchfulness or shifting the muzzle of his gun.

With Kay's eyes closed, Colin had half the setup he wanted. For he had decided that, as time-honored tricks were apparently the order of the day, he was going to try the oldest of them all. But oh, how bitterly he regretted the Webley and the Luger he had left behind in Colonel Stanley's study.

They passed the famous field where William the Conqueror ended the Saxon hopes and started modern history, and, scarcely slowing, drove into the village of Battle. Here they forked right at what appeared, ironically, to be a police station, and took the road that runs north to Robertsbridge. Behind the chauffeur, Kay seemed to be asleep. Behind the doctor, Colin was very much awake. When, oh when, would the other half of the setup arrive?

It arrived about half a mile short of John's Cross—a roaring, racing motorcycle that shot toward them down the straight road. They could hear it—praise be!—for

many seconds before it reached them, and every second it grew noisier. Colin watched it, at first with casual interest, then with concern, finally with alarm. At last, as the roar reached the top of its wild crescendo, he caught his breath and stared in horror over the driver's shoulder. It was too much for the doctor—as it would have been for most people. He whirled round, and was hit neatly and scientifically under the ear by the edge of a hard, taut hand. As he collapsed into the seat, Colin leaned over and lifted the automatic. The motorcycle roared away into the distance.

"Slow down and stop, James," he said amiably, "or I'll blow your neck open and we'll all go up topsides together."

The chauffeur may or may not have been a brave man, but he was not a fool. He brought the car to a gentle stop.

"Switch off," said Colin, and the engine stopped. The utter silence of a Sussex Sunday encompassed them. Colin opened the near side door and handed the gun to Kay. "Shoot him if he wiggles his ears," he said, got out, walked round the car, and opened the driver's door. "Come out, James, and show me where you keep the towrope," he invited. James came out.

The towrope was in the luggage compartment and it proved ideal for Colin's purpose—the trussing of the silent chauffeur. This done, Kay in turn descended, and James was shoved onto the floor of the tonneau. Colin then opened the near front door and looked at the slumped form of the doctor. He looked very closely, then straightened up and started to whistle softly through his teeth.

"Is he coming round, Colin?" Kay was peering past him at the crumpled figure.

"Neither now nor hereafter, I'm afraid," said Colin. "The worthy doctor has had his. That's the trouble with the rabbit punch—it's so difficult to gauge it accurately." He started to whistle again, very softly and quite unconsciously. It was the melody of Chopin's Funeral March.

"You mean he's dead?"

"Very."

Kay shuddered slightly. "What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Put him in the back seat and drive to St. Leonards Police Station."

"With—with me in front?" She was looking at the nearest bucket seat without enthusiasm. Colin understood.

"Or perhaps you would drive? You know the road," he suggested, and was rewarded by a wan smile.

"Am I being very—womanly? I'm sorry. But I'm not quite broke to this sort of thing. Yes, please, I'd much rather drive."

She unostentatiously averted her eyes while Colin transferred the pitiful shape to the back seat and covered it with a traveling rug. Then she took her place at the wheel. He slipped in beside her, and the car started.

Kay turned it in a convenient lane and drove back the way they had come. Her color was returning, Colin noted with approval. And as soon as she spoke he realized that she was deliberately resuming her former mask of easy flippancy.

"Well, well!" she said. "There's nothing like a peaceful English Sunday, is there? You must look forward to this sort of thing all week."

Well, flippancy was as good an antidote as any to the horror in the back. "I do indeed," he agreed. "You can't beat a spot of kidnaping, with a murder or two on the side, for toning you up for the office on Monday morning."

"Incidentally"—her tone was still quite light—"I haven't thanked you yet for saving me, have I?"

"Please don't try to—not while you're driving, anyway. I don't mind being overwhelmed, but I'd hate to be overturned."

"Quaintly enough, I wasn't thinking of that kind of thanks."

"There's some other kind, then?" He was trying des-

perately to keep the thing on its brittle level, but her voice had become much more serious.

"Yes," she said. "Very, very sincere ones—from the bottom of my heart. I was scared stiff every minute of that journey, Colin. No, don't stop me. I'm *not* going to break down. And when you—knocked him out and grabbed the gun I could have wept with relief. So thank you, bless you, and I promise never to be serious with you again. And now talk about something else, please. Tell me who you are and what you do with yourself when you're not jumping out from behind things or doing trick falls off trees."

Colin obliged with a brief and bowdlerized version of his remote and recent history, and learned in turn that Kay kept house for her guardian, wrote occasional verse for *Punch* and children's plays for the radio, hating both equally, and was all set to write the Book of the Century if she could only think of a subject. In the meantime she was learning to cook.

The tension had eased, and their rapport increased by the time the Lancia pulled up outside the police station. Its door stood wide, and they entered.

A gray-haired sergeant, bare-headed, greeted them at the bar as they went in. Colin regarded him with the air of a child about to burst a paper bag behind an unsuspecting elder. "This," he murmured, "is going to shake the police."

"I doubt it." Kay's voice was equally low. "Nothing ever shakes the English constabulary."

"This will," said Colin confidently, and addressed the officer. "Good afternoon, Sergeant," he said pleasantly. "I've just killed a fellow. His body's outside in the car. Also his friend—tied up."

"Indeed, sir?" said the sergeant politely. "And the young lady? Is she a witness?"

"No," said Colin, nettled. "She's an accomplice."

"I see." The sergeant rose from his chair. "If you'll just sit down for a moment, miss, and you too, sir, if you don't mind." He walked to the back of the room and

knocked on a door.

Kay was smiling. "Shaken to the roots, isn't he?" she asked innocently.

Colin scowled. "He doesn't believe me yet, that's all," he said. But there he was wrong, for at that moment the sergeant entered the other room and they heard his voice quite clearly as he addressed someone within.

"It's Mr. Ogilvie and Miss Loring, sir. They've got that Lancia that was stolen, and there's a body in the back. Will you see them, or shall I ask them to make a statement?" There was an indistinguishable rumble in deepest bass, and then the sergeant spoke again. "Very good, sir," he said, and came out into the main room.

"Superintendent Brackett would be glad to see you, if you'll just go in. And if you wouldn't mind giving me the ignition key, sir, I'll drive the car round into the yard. You're not allowed to park on this side of the street on even dates, you know."

Chapter Five

YARD CONFERENCE

DESPITE HIS RESOUNDING VOICE Superintendent Brackett was, for one of his calling, a small man. He had faded red hair, a face like a falcon, and really beautiful teeth.

He listened to Colin's story from start to finish without comment or question. Then, gazing at them with piercing blue eyes that seemed capable of dragging the truth from a politician, he spoke. "So," he boomed, "neither of you's had any lunch?"

Colin and Kay were too startled to do more than shake their heads. "Neither have I," said the superintendent, and jumped to his feet. "I'll get them to send in some sandwiches. A very coherent recital. Fresh ones." He darted out of the room before either of his visitors could think of anything to say.

Five minutes later he returned, rubbing his hands. "That's fixed," he said. "Sardine and cress, cheese and lettuce, and ham. I've spoken to the chief constable and rung Scotland Yard. They'll expect us at half past five. I hope you're as hungry as I am, Miss Loring. That chauffeur fellow refuses to make a statement."

Faint yet pursuing, Colin seized on what seemed the most important sentence. "Do you mean we're going up to Scotland Yard next?" he asked.

The superintendent nodded. "The chief constable feels that the colonel's disappearance is a national business, not a local one. I agree. Fellow called MacCallum we're going to see there. And this attempt on you in the train—that's national too. And your message from Cairo for the Home Office. Sounds like a fellow countryman of yours, with that name. We'll go by road."

"Who is the 'we' that is going up, Mr. Brackett?" asked Kay.

"You, Miss Loring, if you will, Mr. Ogilvie, and

myself."

"Am I under arrest, incidentally?" Colin inquired.

"Not noticeably. You'll be wanted for the inquest, of course, but it's obviously not culpable. You did it in self-defense. On Tuesday morning, probably. But it must have been the deuce of a punch. Monday, if I can get the coroner fixed in time. Killed anyone that way before?"

"Only professionally," said Colin. The superintendent smiled and turned to Kay.

"Don't worry too much about the colonel, Miss Loring. If they'd meant to kill him we'd have found the body by now, so quite obviously they've kidnaped him for some other reason, and in that case he'll be quite safe until we can rescue him. They must be waiting for that lettuce to ripen or something. Ah!" A constable had entered with a tray bearing three large plates of sandwiches, three cups, and a quart jug of coffee. With one magnificent sweep of the arm Brackett cleared a space on his desk, and the food was set down. The three fell to.

At four o'clock precisely they entered a black police car, Brackett tactfully sitting in front with the driver, and set off on their sixty-three-mile trip to London. Colin, remembering a resolve made in much less pleasant circumstances, quietly but efficiently possessed himself of Kay's hand. It seemed quite pleased to lie in his.

It was five twenty-five when they sighted Big Ben, and as that mighty chime told the half-hour they were inside the Yard, greeting Chief Inspector Duncan MacCallum, Detective-Inspector David Stanners, and a pallid, rather negative man named Highway. He, they gathered, was a junior official of S.C.O.2—that Home Office Department of which the missing colonel was deputy head.

Colin had always considered himself—not without justice—to be a pretty hefty specimen, but beside MacCallum he felt almost childish. The chief inspector, he estimated, could give him about two inches and a good forty pounds—and "good" was literally true, for there

was not an ounce of flab on the enormous body, though its owner must have been somewhere in the middle fifties. As for Stanners, a toughly built, rather good-looking young man of about Colin's age, he seemed practically puny beside his chief.

When they were all seated—Stanners, Colin noted with amusement, carefully placing himself where he could legitimately rest his eyes on Kay—the superintendent led off in his startlingly deep voice.

"Technically," he said, "I suppose I'm senior here, but I'd be grateful if you'd conduct the meeting, MacCallum. I've seen you before somewhere, I'm certain. It's going to be your case, anyway, so you might as well take charge right away. In court, it was. All I want to say myself is that the Sussex police will do anything and everything in their power to help you. Just ask us. That's right. At the Old Bailey—those Black Market murders. Nice job of work you did on that. The chief constable is personally interested, and every man jack in the force is yours for the asking." He nodded and sat back.

MacCallum had blinked once or twice during this rather erratic oration, but he showed no sign of bewilderment as he took over.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said. "I think probably the best way to start would be with Mr. Ogilvie's story, if he wouldn't mind telling it again. Then we'll know where we are."

So for the second time that afternoon Colin told of his meeting with Jerry, the burglary of his room, the Evans attack in the train, the encounter with Beau Brummell (or Roy Golding, as the doctor had called him), the fake telephone call to the colonel, and finally his own and Kay's adventures with "Dr. West" and his uncommunicative chauffeur. Unlike Brackett, MacCallum asked an occasional question, and once Stanners threw in a word. Mr. Highway appeared to be horrified by the whole story.

"And that," said Colin at last, "is that. And what it all means, I haven't the slightest idea."

"Just so," said the chief inspector, "just so. Now, Mr. Highway, what can you tell us about all this?"

Mr. Highway seemed to be on the verge of panic. He took off and replaced his pince-nez twice, cleared his throat, and said, "Ah! Well. Well—ah!—practically nothing, I'm afraid. Ah!" He smiled wanly round the group.

"Suppose," said MacCallum gently, "you were to tell us what exactly is this S.C.O.2?"

Mr. Highway cheered up slightly, though his right hand still seemed to be feeling, forlornly, for a file on the subject. "Ah!" he said. "Well. Well, S.C.O.—the entire department, that is—deals with societies, clubs, and organizations. The—ah!—distribution of duties within the branches"—he was warming to his work—"is on a character basis. Organizations of a political character are the province of S.C.O.1, sporting organizations come under S.C.O.3, and so on. We ourselves in—ah!—S.C.O.2 deal with religious institutions of a benevolent nature, such as—ah!—lads' clubs and bodies of that caliber. There is, of course, a certain amount of inter-branch overlapping, as certain types of organization cannot be confined within a single—ah!—category. But in general you may regard S.C.O.2 as dealing with all bodies which involve—ah!—might one say—uplift?" He removed and replaced his pince-nez hurriedly.

"I see," said MacCallum. "Now tell me, what exactly do you mean when you say you 'deal with' these organizations? Do you mean you keep an eye on them and see that they're behaving themselves properly?—paying their bills and auditing their books and not selling beer to non-members, and the like?"

"Ah! Well. Well, not exactly, Chief Inspector. Their—ah!—day-to-day running is a matter for the local authorities—urban and rural district councils and so on—and of course for the police. No. Our concern is with their—ah!—national implications. One might almost say their ideological aspects."

"I think I get it," said Stanners. "You really mean that you keep an eye on the Home Security angle? 'See that

no budding Dr. Ley starts a 'Strength Through Joy' club, or something like that?"

"Precisely. And equally, of course, that no existing institution is—ah!—perverted to serve an end other than its ostensible one: that is, if such an end would be contrary to public policy and the national interest."

"Well," said MacCallum, "that brings us to the present case. I gather, Mr. Highway, that S.C.O.2 is considerably interested in the activities of a certain Mr. Sewell, who attended some sort of conference in Cairo the day before yesterday?"

"I—ah!—gather so," said Mr. Highway cautiously. "But here I'm afraid, Chief Inspector, we reach the end of my—ah!—usefulness." And he proceeded to explain.

A few months before, it seemed, S.C.O.2 had been investigating some new cult on the suspicion that it bore a strong basic resemblance to fascism. A member of the branch had, most injudiciously, mentioned this outside the office. The news had spread. A question had been asked in the House, and there had, in fact, been—ah!—the devil to pay. (Apologetic bow to the lady present.) Thereafter, apparently, Sir Alan Drexter, head of the branch, had ruled that all investigations of a confidential or nonroutine nature would be handled personally by himself or his deputy. And Sir Alan was handling the case of Mr. Sewell. "So I'm afraid," Mr. Highway concluded, "that I can't give you any information either as to Sir Alan's—ah!—suspicions, or as to the progress his investigations have made."

"Who and what *is* this bloke Sewell?" Colin asked.

"I thought everyone had heard of him," said Stanners. "He's Christian Retrospect."

Colin looked blanker than ever. "I've been out of England for several years," he explained, "and I'm afraid I never heard of Christian Retrospect either. What is it? A magazine?"

"It's a religion," said Kay, "or, rather, it's a sort of back-to-nature business. The Retros hold that the world has been deteriorating steadily for umpteen hundred

years, and that we ought to model ourselves on our simple forefathers."

"And what do they do? Wear sandals and grow their own food? That sort of thing?"

"Not quite," said Kay, "but they genuinely do look to the past rather than the present for inspiration. They say life should be a simple affair of black-and-white values—good and evil, right and wrong. They've no use for psychology and alienism and all the theories about sin and virtue being a matter of ductless glands. They tried to convert me once—that's how I know the patter."

"They *sound* pretty harmless," said Colin. "Is the thing popular at all?"

"Extremely," said Mr. Highway. "There are—ah!—Centers, as they call them, in practically every town in the country, and their membership is growing very rapidly. A natural reaction, I imagine, from the—ah!—complexities of modern life."

"So you don't know," MacCallum steered the conversation back to the point, "why Sir Alan was investigating Mr. Sewell?"

The civil servant hesitated for a moment. "Ah! Well. Well, no," he said at last. "Officially, the branch knows nothing against him—or his organization. He founded the—ah!—cult, and he controls it, both spiritually and—ah!—administratively. But there has been nothing in any of his manifestoes to cause us the slightest alarm—they are all sound, practical Christianity if perhaps a trifle primitive for some tastes."

"That," said MacCallum, "is the official view. Unofficially, you suspect something, don't you? What have you heard, now, that makes you wonder if Sewell is the honest lad he's supposed to be?"

Mr. Highway began to blush. "There—ah!—there have been rumors," he mumbled, darting an apologetic look at Kay, "about—ah!—women."

"White slaving, d'you mean?" Stanners had sat up quickly.

Poor Mr. Highway went crimson. "Good—good gra-

cious, no!" he stuttered. "But—ah!—there was a story—the wife of one of his Council—at his retreat up in Scotland—and—ah!—she was probably not the first."

Kay laughed aloud. "I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Highway," she said, "but I couldn't help it. Even if Sewell does take along a girl friend when he goes north for his famous meditations, I just can't see Alan Drexter worrying about it. Alan and Uncle Paul would never waste their time investigating the love life of a false prophet."

"Agree with you," boomed Superintendent Brackett unexpectedly. "I've met Sir Alan and I know Colonel Stanley, and there'd have to be something a lot more serious than a modern Agapemone before they'd be interested. Any idea how Gray comes into it—the chap who was killed in Cairo? They're government servants, not censors of morals. Was he on your staff?"

Mr. Highway, still rather pink, explained that Jerry Gray was one of the vast army of occasional contacts used by the department. The system, he explained, was rather like that of a daily newspaper with its local correspondents—men who had other jobs of their own and might do no corresponding for months at a time, but were available if and when a story broke in their locality. So with Jerry and the department. Presumably Sir Alan (or the colonel, as Sir Alan was on leave) had read in the press that Sewell was visiting Cairo—it had been widely reported—and had sent a routine request to Gray for a confidential report on his movements while there.

Stanners had been looking thoughtful, and now he turned to MacCallum. "There's one thing that's worrying me, sir," he said.

"What's that, Davey?"

"If Sewell's Cairo trip was important enough to end in a murder and a kidnaping, surely it was important enough to keep Sir Alan Drexter at home. I don't understand why he chose this of all times to go off on leave."

"Probably knew Colonel Stanley could handle it," said Brackett, but Kay shook her head vigorously.

"No," she said. "Alan's crazy about that little boat of

his, but he's even crazier about his job. He'd never have gone away if he'd known anything like this was going to happen."

"That means," said MacCallum, "that he had no idea that Sewell was going to meet Zillah. But, by implication, if he *had* known, it would have given him the key to the whole business."

"I don't follow that last bit."

"Well, a *laochain*, look at the trouble they're taking to prevent the news from getting through. It's meaningless to us, but obviously it would be meaning a great deal to Sir Alan and the colonel."

"The answer," said Colin, "would seem to be how soon can we contact Sir Alan?"

"He hasn't got a radio," said Kay. "Not a Morse one, I mean. Of course he's got an ordinary receiver."

MacCallum nodded. "We know that," he said. "We're hoping he'll listen to the six o'clock news tonight and hear about the kidnaping. Otherwise, we can only wait till the boat is sighted by a coast guard or a naval patrol. They've all been warned to look out for him."

At that moment the telephone rang, and the inspector answered it. "Stanners. Yes, Mickey? Good. Doc Moresby, eh? Yes, I remember it well. Right oh, Mickey, thank you. I'll pass it on." He replaced the receiver. "They've identified your body, sir," he said to Brackett. "His fingerprints *were* on the file. He's Doc Moresby—sent down for peddling dope some years ago."

"I remember the case," said the superintendent. "Struck off for it, wasn't he? That's something off your conscience, Mr. Ogilvie. He had a Harley Street practice. You've rid the world of a very undesirable specimen. Sold it to young girls and then blackmailed them. Nice work."

Colin sorted it out mentally and said, "Thank you."

"Well," said MacCallum, with the air of a hostess collecting eyes, "I wonder is there anything else we want to be discussing? Superintendent?" Brackett shook his head. "Davey?" Stanners followed suit. "Aye, well, then,

"I think we can call it a day." He rose and proceeded to take farewell of his guests. But Colin halted him.

"Just one thing, Chief Inspector," he said. "I don't think Miss Loring should go back to St. Leonards to-night. Wouldn't she be safer in town—at a hotel—with police protection?"

"She would that, boy."

"Nonsense," said Kay. "They're not after *me*."

"No? Then why did they carry you off this afternoon?"

"I was only part of the scheme to get *you*. They thought you'd be suspicious if they tried to decoy you away by yourself so they just took me along too. And now that you've delivered your message to the police they won't be after *you* any longer. So where's the danger?"

Colin looked appealingly at MacCallum, and that enormous man came to the rescue. "I think, my dear," he said, "that till we know a bit more about these characters and what they're after, it might not be a bad idea to be doing what Mr. Ogilvie suggests."

"But I hate hotels."

"Have you maybe a relative you could stay with, then?"

"H'm. I *have* got a godmother in Lancaster Gate."

"That's the answer, then," said Colin; and it was duly arranged that Kay should spend the night in the security of a well-peopled home, while the police "kept an eye open" outside.

They emerged on to the Embankment in the warmth of a perfect summer evening and strolled westward. Brackett had gone off to St. Leonards, promising to ring Colin in the morning about the inquest, and Mr. Highway had gone home. The world was at peace, and their silence was wholly companionable. Kay shattered it.

"I'm not going to stay with Aunt Katherine," she said.

"You certainly are."

"No, I'm not. I can't stand the woman. I'll sleep in the flat."

"Alone?"

"Why not?"

"You can't sleep alone, Kay."

"Mr. Ogilvie! Please! Are you by any chance building up to what the papers call A Certain Suggestion?"

Colin grinned. "Funnily enough, I am," he said, "but I wasn't at that particular moment. It'll probably take me days yet. Seriously, Kay, we don't know that the danger's past, and we—"

"Nothing can possibly happen to me in a flat in the heart of London."

"I've known some darned queer things to happen in flats in the heart of—"

"I'm sure you have. But your disgusting past has no bearing—"

"Listen, Kay!" Colin was deadly serious. "We're dealing with a completely ruthless gang of murderers and we can't afford to take the tiniest chance. Frankly, I'd be happier if you were locked up in the Tower, but as we can't have that we'll just have to make do with Lancaster Gate. But on Lancaster Gate I do insist. See?"

For five seconds their eyes met and held while their wills clashed. Then Kay turned away and shrugged. "All right, nurse," she said, "baby'll be good. But I'll have to go to Knightsbridge first to collect some clothes and things."

A taxi took them to Knightsbridge, to a heavily respectable block called Wellington Court. The flat was a small one on the top floor, and while Kay went to her room to throw a few basic belongings into a grip, Colin drank some of Colonel Stanley's excellent gin and Angostura and gazed out of the lounge windows at the remarkable skyline of southwest London. He had identified Harrods' dome and was trying to locate Brompton Oratory when the girl appeared again. She had changed into a cherry-colored woolen suit and looked so delightful that he had an almost overwhelming urge to hug her. Possibly she was psychic, more probably he lacked a poker face, for she said very quickly, "Shall we go out and look for some food? I'm afraid there's nothing much

in the icebox." Colin conquered himself, finished his drink, and followed her out to the lift.

They went to the Normandie, had a couple of Vincent's excellent martinis and a pleasant *vol-au-vent*, and then took a taxi through the Hyde Park gloaming to Lancaster Gate; and as they drove Colin once again found himself quelling his natural impulses. There was something about this girl, he decided, that did things to him. He wondered if she had the same effect on other men. Then he wondered whether the other men had as much self-control as he had, and felt ridiculously miserable when he decided that they probably had not. Then he wondered whether she was grateful for his self-control or was secretly laughing at it, and felt more miserable still. Then he decided that he had better snap out of this and start talking fast on neutral subjects.

"Who is Zillah?" he asked. "I've been wanting to ask all day, but I felt such a bumpkin over Sewell that I hadn't the nerve. Do you happen to know?"

Kay turned from contemplation of the strolling crowds. "Isn't he a mysterious international wizard of finance or something?" she said. "The sort of fabulous figure who crouches behind thrones and flits through chancelleries and finances *coups d'état*? Or am I thinking of someone else?"

"No," said Colin, "you're not. I remember reading about him now. Akim Zillah. He's supposed to be worth untold millions and to pull half the political strings in Europe. Gosh! I wonder what the Prophet of Retrospect wanted with him?"

"Maybe he's trying to convert him. The Zillah millions would look pretty good in the offertory."

"I doubt it," said Colin, and fell to thought.

The taxi drew up at a large regency house in a quiet street and they got out. As it drove off and they mounted the six steps to the door, Colin felt an odd sense of restraint. What *was* the matter with him tonight? he wondered.

"What time is it?" asked Kay as she rang the bell.

He glanced at his watch. "Nine forty-one," he said. "Exactly twelve hours to the minute since we first—ran into each other."

"Never shall I forget that meeting," said Kay dramatically. "My memory of it is still tender. So is my—so am I. You swept me off my feet, you hulking great oaf." She smiled at him affectionately, with a most adorable wrinkling of the nose. Yes, he saw exultantly, it *was* affection. He took a quick decision, a deep breath, and a pace forward. A small maid opened the door.

"Good evening, Miss Kay," she said.

"Good evening, Brenda. Good night, Colin—and thank you."

Slowly Colin expelled his deep breath. His soul felt deflated too. "Good night, Kay," he said. "I'll phone you in the morning."

"Steady!"

"The forenoon," he corrected, and they both smiled. "Good night." The door closed behind her.

Colin walked to Bayswater Road and turned left. It was early yet. He would walk at least part of the way back to the club, he decided, and commune with his Celtic soul.

The communion was very brief, for he had not covered 50 yards when a tall, bowler-hatted man in sober gray, who had been hurrying past, halted, stared, and finally spoke. "Isn't it Major Ogilvie?" he said.

"It was," said Colin cautiously, "a few years back." He no longer had any trust in affable strangers.

"I thought I wasn't mistaken. My name's Carter. We met in Bombay in—let me think—January '46."

"Did we?" Colin's tone showed no enthusiasm.

"We did. In the Harbor Bar—or was it the Argentina? No, it was the Harbor Bar at the Taj. You were with a very snappy little blonde—a Mrs. Somebody-or-other—I forget her name. Lived on Malabar Hill. Anyway, she knew the Wren I was with, and that's how we came to team up."

It sounded genuine, but Colin had a wholesome re-

spect for "Them" and he was still skeptical. "I was certainly in Bombay in January '46," he admitted, "but I'm afraid I don't remember you."

"I'm not surprised at that," said Carter. "When I met you, you and this wench were trying to see how fast you could get through your gratuity, and from all appearances you were making record speed. I should think there's quite a lot of that period that you don't remember. And what are you doing now?"

"Oh, just drifting about. I've been abroad till recently."

"Lucky you. I came home on release and had the dickens of a time getting a job. Still, I'm all right now—librarian at a C.R. Center. The work's light and the money's not too—"

"C.R. Center? What's that?" A wild hope had suddenly sprung up in Colin's mind.

"Christian Retrospect. It's quite a decent—"

"That's Sewell's show?"

"That's right. As a matter of fact it was Sewell who gave me the job. I had known him at school, you see, and when I heard—" He prattled on, and Colin thought fast. If this chap were genuine—and it was hard to see how he could have come by his circumstantial details if he were not—and if he knew Sewell, as he seemed to, **then** he was a contact well worth cultivating.

He cut in on the Carter monologue. "Come and have a drink," he said. "I'm rather interested in Christian Retrospect and I'd like to talk to you about it."

"Oh!" said Carter doubtfully. "I'm not sure that I've got time, you know. My wife—"

"She won't worry for another fifteen minutes," said Colin, "and that's all we've got before they close. Come on."

"All right," said Carter; "just a quick one."

They were standing, providentially, just outside The Wheatsheaf. Colin led the way into the saloon bar and, while Carter neatly annexed a small table in a corner, pushed his way up to the counter and bought two pints

"And now," he said as he sat down, "tell me something about this Christian Retrospect business. Cheers!"

"Cheers! Well, what exactly do you want to know?"

"How is it run? Is it just a set of beliefs like—say—Behaviorism, or is it a pukka organized church?"

"It's very highly organized indeed, though it's not really a church. All the District and Provincial Centers link through Divisional Centers to the Governing Council. I'm at Third London, incidentally. It's just round the corner, in Cleveland Square. Why don't you drop in one day, if you're interested, and let me show you round?"

"I will. And you get all your orders and so on from this Governing Council?"

"Through division, yes."

"And the Council, I take it, is really Sewell?"

"For all practical purposes I suppose it is. He's a wonderful man, Ogilvie. You've never met such dynamic energy. He's a genuine visionary, but he's a brilliant organizer too. The library side, for example—we work a circulating exchange system with the other Centers in the Division, and honestly it goes like clockwork."

"Thanks to Sewell?"

"I think so. And last year, when we held our National Congress, it was simply amazing. Four thousand delegates came from all over Britain, and every one of them was met, housed, fed, shown around—all without one single hitch."

"Sounds like excellent staff work."

"Oh, it was. But all unified and controlled by Sewell. Knock that back. We've just time for another."

Colin handed over his empty glass and, while Carter pushed his way counterward through the crowds who were eagerly obeying the landlord's exhortations to give their last orders gents *please*, tried to analyze what he had learned. It boiled down, he decided, to the fact that this man Sewell controlled absolutely an organization of considerable size, run very efficiently on semimilitary

lines. Obviously such a thing was capable of being easily converted to wrongful uses—on paper. But could thousands of Christian Britons be converted to evil as easily? He doubted it. Unless there was something dangerous in its creed that Highway and his friends had overlooked, he failed to see how Christian Retrospect could ever menace the realm.

The landlord was inviting all and sundry to hurry along now gents *please* by the time Carter returned with the beer. "We'll have to drink up," he said. "They're closing. Cheers!"

"Cheers!" said Colin, and lowered three quarters of the pint at one go. "Tell me, Carter, are there any political implications in this thing? I mean, does Sewell hold any particular views on how the country should be run, for instance?"

"Great Scott, no. None at all. C.R. is purely a code of ethics, based on the teachings of the Bible, and everyone's at liberty to apply them as he sees fit. All that Sewell does— What on earth's the matter, old boy?"

Colin was staring at him stupidly. The stuffy little room had suddenly become unbearably hot. He saw two or three faces turn curiously toward him and then fade into a shimmering blur. He tried to speak, and could not; made a tremendous effort, and managed to utter a single word. "Air!" he croaked.

Several bystanders were interested now, and one of them stepped forward. "Get him outside," he said. "He'll be all right in the fresh air." He put an arm through one of Colin's, Carter took the other, and between them, somehow, they managed to get him through the rapidly parted crowd and on to the pavement outside.

But the fresh air brought no improvement. Instead, he felt a wave of nauseating cold sweep over him in place of the former heat, the world turned black, and he felt his head whirling. Just before the darkness took him, he had a moment of clear vision, and in it he saw the face of the helpful bystander. It was the exquisite Golding—Brummell. And he was grinning triumphantly at Carter.

Chapter Six

ROUGH TIME AT ROY'S PLACE

COLIN AWOKE, SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY, to three realizations. First, that he felt terrible. Second, that he was lying on the floor of a comfortably furnished room he had never seen before. Third, that he was bound hand and foot. He tried to sit up, fell back, and groaned. "The Sleeping Beauty," said a voice, "is coming round."

He turned his head and saw the speaker. It was Golding, his clothes a symphony in blending blues, his eyes burning with hate. He was stretched out in an armchair beside the empty fireplace, and opposite him, a look of amusement on his face, sat Carter.

"Well, Major," said the latter, "I shouldn't have thought a couple of pints would hit you like that. We had no end of trouble getting you round 'ere to Roy's place. You'd passed right out. D'you suppose there could have been something wrong with that second beer?" His mocking grin was infuriating.

"How did you know about Bombay?" said Colin. He had not consciously meant to say it, but he heard the words and knew that it was he who had spoken them. His lips felt stiff and dry.

"My dear chap, if you *will* shout the details of your lurid life story all over Cairo, you must expect some of it to be overheard. And passed on where it will do most good."

Golding rose to his feet and looked down at the bound figure. Then, with a sudden flare up of fury, he kicked it in the ribs. "You conceited ape," he said viciously, and spat.

"Starting already, Roy?" asked Carter, and glanced at his watch. "Yes, I suppose you're right. It's nearly eleven." He, too, rose to his feet. "Ogilvie," he said, "you're going to make a phone call for us. I don't sup-

pose you'll want to, but I think we'll be able to persuade you."

"I *know* we shall," said Golding, and kicked him again. Colin bit his lip and said nothing.

"You're going to telephone," Carter went on, "to Kay Loring. And you're going to tell her to meet you at midnight at the corner of Henkel Street and Prince Street—that's quite near where she's staying."

"You're crazy," said Colin, and Golding kicked him again.

"You'll get your turn to talk," he said.

"I am perfectly well aware," Carter continued as if there had been no interruption, "that the police are watching Miss Loring's house. But you will tell her that she must give them the slip. She can do it if she comes out by the back door and goes along the lane. Tell her that you've got in touch with the people who kidnaped her guardian, and that this is her only chance of saving his life. And make it sound convincing, for if she doesn't fall for it, it's going to be just too bad for you. Understand all that?"

"Perfectly." Colin's lips were working more easily now and the pounding in his head had died down a little. "What I don't understand is why you think I'm going to do it."

"You'll do it all right," said Carter confidently. He turned to Golding. "I'm going down to fill up the car, Roy," he said. "I'll be back in ten minutes, but don't wait for me if you want to start—reasoning with him." He went out. Golding looked down at his helpless victim and smiled.

"So you don't want to play?" he said, and drove his foot savagely against the bruised ribs. "Think you're a little he-man with hair on your chest, eh? You poor fool, you'll be screaming for mercy in five minutes." His voice had risen shrilly, and for a moment he seemed as if he were going to hurl himself on Colin. Then he regained control, turned away, and sat on the arm of a chair. His eyes gleamed, and his lips were slightly parted. With a

horribly feline movement he licked them.

"What's it to be, Ogilvie?" he asked. "Something Chinese? *Ling chi*, perhaps? The Death of a Thousand Cuts, as they call it? Or one of those ingenious little Indian tortures? You've been in India, haven't you? Did you ever come across the *Kittee*?"

Colin had, and he remembered it clearly—a small wooden contrivance, cousin to the English thumbscrew, designed to compress the ears, the nose, or some other tender part of the body, and compress it until the victim fainted in sheer agony. He said nothing.

"Or how about *anundal*? D'you think you'd like to sit with your head tied on to your toes and your arms up your back for an hour or two? It doesn't sound very bad, but I've seen a stronger man than you praying for mercy after twenty minutes." There was a light in his eyes that was just not sane, and Colin realized, with a feeling of sick helplessness, that the man was either a lunatic or, more probably, doped to the hilt.

"Or what price that old redskin trick—slivers of wood under the fingernails? Yes, do you know I think we'll start with that—it's so simple. And so excruciating." He rose, crossed the room, and opened the lid of a small radio-phonograph. There was a box of fiber needles in his hand when he returned and knelt beside Colin. "Afterward, if you're still being foolish—and I almost hope you will be—we might utilize some of the persuasive properties of flame. Applied to the armpits, for example. But in the meantime we'll see what we can do with—this!"

As he talked he had been opening the box, selecting a needle and edging its sharp point under the middle nail of Colin's left hand. Now he rammed it home, and a stab of purest agony brought the sweat to the victim's brow. He gulped back a cry. Golding carefully selected another needle.

For ten minutes thereafter Colin suffered in a silence that became increasingly difficult to keep. Carter had returned and, after an amused glance at the scene, ig-

nored it in favor of a copy of *Esquire*. But now he spoke. "I hate to hurry you, Roy," he said, "but it's getting late. Can't you talk to him seriously? You haven't decided to be sensible, I suppose, Ogilvie?" Colin said nothing.

"All right," said Golding, rising to his feet. "Lend me your lighter and I'll have him abject in two minutes." Carter tossed over a gold cigarette lighter. And somewhere in the flat a bell rang suddenly.

Golding froze. "That's the doorbell," he whispered. "Who the devil can it be?"

Carter shrugged. "Ignore it," he said. "They'll go away." From his jacket pocket he took a .32 Smith and Wesson with a silencer, and swung it idly toward Colin.

For fully thirty seconds the three remained motionless. Colin debated the value of shouting and decided against it. He would be shot before he could get out two syllables. Then the bell rang again. Again they waited for thirty silent seconds. Then the bell rang for the third time.

"They've seen the light under the door," said Golding. "We'll have to answer. You go, Dick, and tell them I'm not in."

Carter rose without a word, pocketed his revolver, and left the room. Colin again considered shouting, decided that it would probably mean the death of the unknown caller, and remained silent. They heard Carter's footsteps cross the hall, heard the click as the front door opened. There was a brief murmur of voices. And then the front door closed again.

As the footsteps recrossed the hall, Golding relaxed and grinned a grin of triumph. "So near and yet so far, eh?" he said tauntingly. The door of the room opened and David Stanners walked in.

"Good evening," he said amiably, side-stepped Golding's wild rush, and hung a faultless right hook on the unguarded chin. The immaculate form folded gently on the floor as a uniformed sergeant entered the room.

"So MacCallum was right," Stanners said, as he knelt

by Colin and began to cut through his bonds. "He said we ought to tail you, and I said it wasn't necessary." He caught his breath as he saw the mutilated hands. "The filthy swine!" he said slowly.

"I'm very glad you did tail me," Colin croaked. Cramps in every part of his body were almost swamping the throbbing pain of his finger tips. "Things were becoming very unpleasant."

The sergeant coughed. "Excuse me, sir," he said, in a rich north-country accent. "Shall I put prisoner in't 'van wi' t'other bloke?"

"Yes, please," said Stanners; and then, on an impulse, "Sergeant! Take a look at Mr. Ogilvie's hands."

The sergeant looked, and swore softly. "They haven't half mucked you up," he said. "Which of 'em did it, sir? This chap in blue suit?" Colin nodded, and the sergeant jerked Golding to his feet with one hamlike hand and ran him, half stumbling, from the room.

With some massage from the inspector, Colin's limbs came slowly to less painful life. And, as he flexed his strained muscles, he heard the story of his rescue.

On MacCallum's hunch, it appeared, he and Kay had been followed from the moment they left the Yard. One trailer had peeled off at Lancaster Gate and taken station outside the house. The other had stuck to Colin, watched his meeting with Carter and seen his unconscious body driven off in Golding's car a few minutes later. He had followed in a taxi, located the Golding flat, and promptly phoned Stanners, with the gratifying results that Colin had seen. Carter, of course, had been grabbed as he opened the door, and was already in the prison van below.

As the telling ended the sergeant reappeared. His large ruddy face was solemn, but his eyes twinkled. "I regret to report, sir," he said, "that prisoner attempted to resist arrest. I were therefore constrained to employ force."

Stanners looked at him with perfect understanding. "Not too *much* force, I trust, Sergeant?" he inquired

unctuously.

"Enough," said the sergeant simply. And even the tormented Colin smiled.

The sergeant and two constables departed with their haul in the van, and a patrol car took Stanners and Colin to St. Michael's Hospital, where a youthful house surgeon commendably suppressed his curiosity and dressed the mutilated fingers in silence. Then the car proceeded to the Absentees Club.

Here the two would have parted, but the porter who helped Colin from the car had news to tell. "There's a couple of gentlemen waiting for you in the smokeroom, Mr. Ogilvie," he said. "I told them you was out, but they said they'd wait."

"They did, did they? Did they give any names?"

"Yes sir. Sir Alan Drexter and Mr. MacCallum."

"Drexter, by jove! Hear that, Stanners?"

"Yes," said the young inspector. "Maybe I'd better come in with you—if you don't mind."

"I think you had," said Colin, and led the way.

Chief Inspector MacCallum, looking larger than ever, was sitting in a corner of the leather-and-mahogany smokeroom. Beside him, chewing on a briar, sat a slim, athletic-looking man who might have been anything from thirty to forty-five, and was in fact forty. He had clean-cut features, short dark hair, and a deep tan. His eyes were spaniel-brown and humorous, and he wore aged but well-cut tweeds.

MacCallum made the introductions. Colin rang for coffee; explained—helped out by Stanners—the condition of his hands and the reason for his lateness; and the four settled to talk.

Drexter, it seemed, had arrived in London only an hour or two before. "Stroke of sheer luck," he said. His voice was accentless and quiet. "If I'd been on board the boat I might not have got here for days. But I'd left her at Connel Ferry, in Loch Etive, this morning and gone down to Glasgow by train to see about some stores,

so when I heard about Stanley's disappearance on the six o'clock news I just shot off to Renfrew, got a taxi plane, and came south at once. Got into Heath Row at nine o'clock."

"And came straight to the Yard," said MacCallum. "I've told Sir Alán the whole story as far as we know it, Mr. Ogilvie, including your message from Cairo."

"And?" Colin tried to subdue his excitement.

"It doesn't mean a thing to me," said Drexter:

Colin's face fell. "You mean—this Zillah business—it doesn't fit in with anything you know already?"

Drexter shook his head. "Not a thing," he said. "I can only assume that Stanley got on to something after I went on leave, and that the message would have had some significance for him. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't ring any sort of bell at all."

"Then why exactly were you investigating Sewell, sir?" asked Stanners.

Drexter shrugged. "Firstly," he said, "because he obviously wields a very considerable influence; and secondly, because of late he's been very friendly with Guy Manning, the Independent M.P., and on the surface they've got absolutely nothing in common. So I wondered."

"But you don't know of any scheme that might be coming to a head?"

"I don't know of anything definite at all. I merely saw a wolf and a lamb getting friendly and—I wondered."

"That's what Kay said," said Colin. "She insisted that you'd never have gone off on a cruise if you'd thought anything important was going to go wrong."

"And she was right, bless her," said Drexter, and Colin felt a sudden pang of sheerest jealousy. Kay, he remembered, had always referred to Drexter as "Alan," and seemed to know him intimately. Was the baronet one of those Other Men about whom he had been worrying? Was he, perhaps, the one and only Other Man? It was a miserable thought. But Drexter was still talking. "It hasn't been purely a pleasure trip," he was saying. "I *have* mixed a little business with it. I've been pottering

round the Firth of Lorne and Loch Linnhe way."

"Ah!" said MacCallum in comprehension. "Keeping a friendly eye on the Morvern coast, perhaps?"

"Precisely."

Colin and Stanners looked equally blank, and the chief inspector hastened to explain. Sewell's Argyllshire "Retreat," the Highland fastness to which he retired for meditation (and other, less spiritual comforts, if Mr. Highway was to be believed), was a lonely house on the Morvern shore of Loch Linnhe. Its name was Tyndor—pronounced with the accent on the second syllable—and it was apparently miles from anywhere. "A gaunt big barrack of a place," said Drexter, "in the worst period of Scottish baronial. It sits on a spur overlooking the loch, a thousand feet up, and even the sheep steer clear of it. D'you know it, MacCallum?"

"Fine that. I was born and brought up on the other side of the loch—Port Appin way. Many's the time when I was a youngster I've looked across at Tyndor and wondered what sort of dark deeds might be happening in it."

"Well, so far as I could see, nothing dark or light has happened in it lately—not up till last night, anyway. Of course Sewell's been away."

"He landed in England this evening," said MacCallum, "and told the reporters at the airport that he was going up to Morvern immediately."

"He did?" Drexter's quiet voice was almost excited. "You didn't tell me— Then that makes it almost certain. They *must* have taken Stanley up there."

Stanners looked dubious. "I don't see how that follows, sir," he said.

"Well, just look at it. Sewell or his confederates kidnaped Colonel Stanley. Agreed?"

"It's possible," said MacCallum cautiously.

"It's practically certain. Right. Having kidnaped him, what do they do with him? Take him to where the boss is, obviously. And that's Tyndor."

"I don't agree," said Stanners. "Morvern is—what?—

over five hundred miles from St. Leonards. Why take him all that distance, with the continual risk of being seen en route, when they only want to keep him out of the way for a few days? It's far more trouble than it's worth."

"But how do we know," asked Colin, "that they only want to keep him out of the way for a few days?"

"It stands to reason. He knows something—we don't know what—which, added to your bit of knowledge, means trouble for them. But as long as these items of information are kept separate, they're quite safe. So all they've got to do is make sure that you and the colonel don't meet. And they can do that without taking him to Scotland."

"Are you quite certain," Drexter said quietly, "that they haven't some bigger reason for kidnaping Stanley? Suppose they don't merely want to keep him quiet—suppose they want to make him talk."

"What about?" It was MacCallum who spoke.

"About how much he's found out. About what steps he's taken to circumvent their scheme—whatever it is. He may have done quite a lot in the week I've been away, you know. He certainly put Jerry Gray on to watch Sewell in Cairo, and he may have taken other steps as well."

"That," said Colin, "would tie in very neatly with the fact that they obviously want to kidnap Kay Loring as well."

"How, *à laochain*?"

"Well, if they had her in their power, she'd be a very effective lever to make the colonel talk. They could threaten to hurt her."

Stanners frowned. "Isn't that a trifle on the penny blood side?" he said. Colin held up his bandaged hands.

"Think so?" he asked simply.

Drexter smiled grimly. "I think you're right, Ogilvie," he said. "And it makes me more certain than ever that Stanley's been taken to Tyndor. It's—it's such an ideal place for skulduggery of that kind. You've seen it, Mac-

Callum. I only know it from the water, but—well—isn't it the perfect setting for blood-and-thunder crookery?"

"Oh yes," said MacCallum, "it is all that. But I doubt we can hardly get a search warrant on the ground that the house looks sinister."

"I know you can't. But you *can* watch it—throw a cordon of men round the area, and—"

"Scotland Yard," said MacCallum, "has, paradoxically enough, no jurisdiction in Scotland. We can't send a single man up there unless the Secretary of State for Scotland specifically asks the Home Secretary to tell us to. Mind you, it *can* be arranged, but nobody knows better than yourself, Sir Alan, how long a bit of red tape like that can be taking."

"What about the local police?" Stanners suggested. "Couldn't we ask them—semi-officially—to keep an eye on the place?"

"Aye," said MacCallum, "aye, Davey, 'we might do that. I could be phoning Donald Beaton that's the inspector at Salen, and asking—"

"No good," said Drexter. "Unless it was official, and high priority at that, he couldn't spare the men. And it would be worse than useless to have some big—" He paused delicately, on the edge of the abyss.

"Some big Hielan' stirk of a policeman standing on the sky line with opera glasses and a wee notebook," said MacCallum cheerfully. "You're quite right, Sir Alan. So what do you suggest?"

Drexter looked at Colin appraisingly, and the brown eyes were extremely shrewd. "How are your hands?" he asked.

"Sore," said Colin, "but mending every minute. They're certainly strong enough to hold binoculars, or even throats, at a pinch." He smiled, and the baronet smiled back in perfect understanding.

"That's our suggestion, MacCallum," he said; and they proceeded to arrange details.

While Drexter, in *Kestrel*, continued to "potter about" off the coast and watch the seaward approaches to Tyn-

dor, Colin would base himself on shore and keep an unobtrusive eye on the landward side; both, collectively and individually, reserving the right to deal with situations as they arose. If and when anything broke that seemed to warrant official intervention, they would contact MacCallum through the nearest local police office.

The chief inspector in the meantime would initiate the high-level exchanges which must precede such intervention, so that there might be no delay if and when the balloon went up. He would also, of course, pursue his so far clueless investigations into the kidnaping, keep a close guard on Kay, and persuade Superintendent Brackett to have the Moresby inquest adjourned until the principal witness became available.

"I think," he said, "that we'd better give it out that you are in the hospital with the towsing these two characters gave you tonight. That will give Brackett an excuse for adjourning the inquest, it'll give us an excuse for remanding Carter and Golding, and forby it may stoppe these *amadhans* of Sewell's from looking out for you when you go north."

Colin thanked him warmly. "Oh, and by the way," MacCallum added, "I was thinking maybe you might find it not very easy to get suitable quarters—within striking distance of Tyndor at least—and it occurred to me that you could not do better than stay with my cousin Niall at Clanachie. It's a wee village about five miles from Tyndor, and I doubt you'll not get a bed nearer. Morvern's not exactly what you would call a congested area."

So that, too, was agreed, and MacCallum, borrowing a sheet of the club note paper, proceeded to write a letter of introduction to one Niall MacLean, sometime dominie of Strontian School and now retired to Rose Cottage, Clanachie, Argyll.

As he wrote, Colin and Drexter discussed their program. "If we can reach Glasgow in time for the eight o'clock train," said the latter, "you'll get to Oban shortly after noon, and that will let you catch the mail boat to

Morvern at one-fifteen. Otherwise, you probably won't reach there tomorrow at all. Can you be ready to leave here at half past four?"

Colin looked at his watch. It was nearly one o'clock. He grinned wryly. "Why not?" he said. "It gives me time for a bath and a shave. I can always have a sleep some other night."

"Good man," said Drexter. "I'll ring the fellow who flew me down—he's sleeping out at Heath Row—and tell him he's got a return fare. And I'll pick you up in a cab at four-thirty." He rose to his feet, yawning, and Colin rose with him. For a moment they studied each other—the one tall, broad, and hefty, the other by comparison slight, but with the wiry, compact build of the born athlete. Simultaneously they smiled.

"Something tells me," said Colin, "that I'm going to enjoy this trip immensely."

"Me too," said Drexter. "Though I doubt if the sainted Sewell is going to get much fun out of it."

Chapter Seven

OBAN AND POINTS NORTH

A FAIR TAIL WIND for more than half the journey helped the air taxi to ground at Renfrew next morning with time in hand; and a hired car—standing by on a phone message from Drexter—brought the two comfortably to Buchanan Street Station, Glasgow, at a quarter to eight. The station bookstall was open and Colin, buying an armful of newspapers and the more pictorial sorts of magazine, was able also to buy a quarter-inch map of Argyll. And to this, when he had rejoined Drexter in an empty compartment, he devoted himself.

"You can have the literature and the lovelies," he said. "I'd better get some notion of the terrain before we go into action."

"I thought you'd probably know it already."

"Why?"

"Well surely by now 'your foot is on your native heath, your name's MacGregor'?"

Colin grinned. "I'm afraid my native heath is on the other side of Scotland," he said. "Glenisla, to be precise. Apart from some climbing in Skye and a fishing week-end in Mull when I was a kid, I hardly know the west coast at all."

"It's grand country," said Drexter. "Almost as good as some parts of England." He glanced innocently down at the *Glasgow Herald*.

"Sir," quoted Colin, "to be facetious it is not necessary to be obscene." And, feeling that he had neatly rounded off the exchange, he settled to the study of his map.

Morvern, he found, was a peninsula, roughly triangular in shape and prevented from being an island only by a narrow isthmus between two long arms of the Atlantic—Loch Sunart and Loch Linnhe. It had few villages and fewer roads, and, in that part which was

his immediate concern, the southern Linnhe shore, it seemed to have neither. Clanachie he found inland, some four miles from the coast, but Tyndor was not marked. It must, he calculated, be roughly level with the northern tip of Lismore (a long, slender island which ran up the loch parallel to the Morvern side) and must look straight across to the more civilized shores of Appin.

The more he looked, the more he agreed with Drexter's view that the place was ideal for skulduggery. It was isolated to a degree and, though technically on the mainland, was, for all practical purposes, approachable only by sea, for the landward route would involve skirting half-a-dozen sea lochs, with an inordinate waste of mileage. No, the only reasonable way into Morvern was by boat: either by the mail-boat service from Oban to Lochaline in the south of the peninsula—which was the route he was going to follow—or by some sort of ferry across the five-mile stretch of Loch Linnhe from Appin, which had both road and rail connection with the larger world.

"What's the Morvern shore like for landing on?" he asked. Drexter looked up from *Picture Post* and took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Pretty poor," he said. "Shingle in a few places and rocks in the rest. As far as Loch Linnhe's concerned anyway. The hills rise up pretty sheer all the way along—as much as two thousand feet at some points—so even if you did land you'd have the deuce of a sweat up to the top."

"So the only practical approach to Tyndor is the way I'm going—sail to Lochaline, and walk or drive up the Kingairloch road till you're Tyndor-high, as it were, and then strike eastward overland?"

Drexter pondered for a moment. "For heavy loads, yes," he agreed. "But any reasonably active man could make it from the shore. There's quite a decent patch of shingle below the house, and some sort of sheep track up to it. Remember, it's not on top of the hills, it's on a kind of spur that juts out, oh, a good five hundred feet

below the summit. The house itself is not more than a thousand feet above sea level."

"I see. And apart from these two routes it's unapproachable?"

"Except by going right round Loch Etive, Loch Leven, Loch Linnhe, and Loch Eil. Sound strategic position, isn't it? A hundred and eighty degrees are of observation seaward, and about the same inland if they like to post a couple of men on the heights behind the house. No, Mr. Sewell's going to be very difficult to take by surprise."

"Very," said Colin gloomily, and went back to his map.

By ten o'clock he decided that he had memorized every possible detail that could be learned without actual sight of the country. So, settling back in his corner, he gave himself over to sheer enjoyment of the scenery.

And it was worth enjoying. The Glasgow-Oban line, once it gets past Callander, is one of the loveliest in the world. Ben, glen and loch, forest and field, succeed each other again and again, in a homogeneous variety of beauty. Even the names of little intermediate stations have a lilt of poetry in them—Crianlarich, Taynuilt, Dalmally, Luib, Lochawe, Strathyre.

Northward through wild Glen Ogle, westward down Glen Dochart, north again through Strathfillan, and west again down Glen Lochy the track wound its way. And at every mile there was history to enhance the beauty. Here, three centuries before, Graham of Montrose had fought gloriously for his king. There, three centuries before that, Macdougall of Lorne had fought bitterly against his—and beaten him, too, though eight years later the loser was to rout a much greater foe at Bannockburn. And here, there, and everywhere, unknown and unsung clansmen, since ever the clans were, had lived, loved, fought, and died for the thousand forgotten causes that went to the making of Scotland.

They had passed Dalmally now, and suddenly Loch Awe came into sight, with the ruins of Kilchurn Castle.

It is perhaps the loveliest stretch on the whole journey, and it certainly affected Colin profoundly. Every day, he reflected as the train swung along the water's edge, every day in all the years he had been away—except Sundays, of course, for Scotland, though commercial, was still a strictly Presbyterian country—trains had been running up and down this line, passing all these places, and he—he had been wasting his time in the far corners of the earth. He had been away from home too long.

He glanced at Drexter and found the baronet regarding him with an amused smile. "My next trick," said the latter, "will be a little mind reading. You have just decided that, after all, Scotland is the only place to live. Do I win the coconut?" Slightly shamefaced, Colin nodded. His companion laughed aloud. "The joke is," he said, "that, at the moment, you really believe you do think that. The Scots are a wonderful race, but they fall into two classes—the ones abroad who're longing to get home, and the ones at home who're longing to get abroad. The intermediate stage, which you're in at the moment, lasts about three months. A wonderful race."

Colin opened his mouth to reply, paused, and closed it again. Then he grinned. "Maybe you're right," he said. "Nonetheless, I prefer it to the English technique."

"Which is?"

"Not to care where you are so long as you can *pretend* you're at home. Cricket in California, stiff shirts in Sumatra, and *The Times* in Timbuktu."

"*Touché*," said Drexter. "Though I've also met bagpipes in Barbados and Burns Night in Bengal."

"Add Scotch in both hemispheres," said Colin, "and you've probably got the secret of the British Empire." He returned his attention to the scenery.

They ran through the darkly menacing Pass of Brander, where Robert the Bruce avenged his defeat at the hands of Lorne, and then, emerging from the shadow of Ben Cruachan, they came to Taynuilt and a full sight of Loch Etive. Drexter started to assemble his baggage.

"I get out at Connel Ferry," he said. "That's where I

left *Kestrel*. Oban's about twenty minutes farther on."

"Right," said Colin. "And we meet again tomorrow night?"

"Eleven o'clock at Kingairloch. It's an inlet about three miles north of Tyndor, and well out of sight."

"I remember it on the map. How do I recognize *Kestrel*, in case I have to?"

"Ah! A good point. She's a very elderly little yawl—Albert Strange designed her in 1910—green to the waterline and black below. Thirty-one feet long and a six tonner, with moderate overhangs and a canoe stern. I shouldn't think there'll be anything else around that you could mistake for her, but if there is, remember that *Kestrel's* got a jackyard topsail. Any other yawl you see is practically certain to have Bermudian rig, but I prefer the old-fashioned plan. It's faster to leeward, and—well—it's more fun to set."

"You sail her singlehanded?"

The other nodded. "I once took a deck hand," he said, "and he ran me aground on a falling tide. No, sir. Rugged individualism is the watchword of the Drexters. Besides, it's more fun by yourself."

"In that case I need hardly ask if you have an auxiliary engine?"

"You need not indeed. I'm a yachtsman—not a floating chauffeur."

"One other thing. It's a very remote chance, but what does Colonel Stanley look like? Just in case I *should* happen to get a glimpse of him?"

"Tall. Tall as you are, though not so broad. Age about sixty, military haircut, close-clipped mustache, fine features, and what looks like a slight limp. Actually it's an artificial leg. He looks just what he is—a distinguished old soldier."

"Good," said Colin, and repeated the two descriptions mentally till he had them by heart.

The train pulled into Connel Ferry and stopped. Dexter opened the door, dismounted, and turned. "I don't know just what we may be running into, Ogilvie,"

he said, "but I've got a hunch that it's pretty big. Keep both eyes open, don't trust the Archangel Gabriel till you've seen his warrant card, and—good luck!" He smiled, and was gone down the platform—a slim, wiry figure with square shoulders and the stride of a moss trooper. Colin closed the door thoughtfully.

Twenty minutes later the train came to its final halt and he stepped out into the waft of ozone which is Oban's first greeting to visitors. Looking appreciatively around him as he sauntered out of the station, he saw the almost landlocked bay that has given safe anchorage, in its time, to every type of man-made craft from the hollowed tree trunks of the New Stone Age to the galleys of the Norsemen and, more recently, the Sunderlands of the Royal Air Force. Beyond Kerrera, the outer bulwark of the bay, lay the island of Mull. And to the north—his heart leaped as he identified them—rose the lofty hills of Morvern.

To his immediate east, however, rose the station hotel, and with the sight of it came a strong urge toward lunch. He moved rapidly eastward.

A drink and a square if quick meal brought him to one o'clock. And, with quarter of an hour to spare, he strolled down to the North Pier and the mail boat, reveling in the slight salt breeze that tempered the warm June sunshine. Scotland was good for him, Colin decided. Already his rucksack felt half the weight it had been in London, and his knees, cased in good English flannel, longed for the freedom of the faded old kilt that lay at the bottom of his kit. He wished that Kay were with him, and thought of the fun he could have, showing her around. One of these days, perhaps—Sinister saints and armed assassins seemed very far away.

A large black car, a Solwing Thirty with the new fluted radiator, driving away from the pier, purred softly past him. There was a man in the back whose face was vaguely familiar, but for the moment he could not place it. Not that it mattered much—there must be hundreds of familiar faces driving around his native land.

Ten minutes later he had forgotten the whole incident, as the Royal Mail Motor Vessel *Lochinvar* carried him past Kerrera, Maiden Island, and Dunollie Castle, westward into the Firth of Lorne. Save for the faintest hint of a swell the sea was like glass, and the mail boat chugged along at a fair speed. There were few other passengers (unless—disgusting thought—any were frowsting in the saloon) and he had a walkable stretch of the foredeck to himself. He paced it happily.

As they sailed farther into the firth, Loch Linnhe opened up to starboard, and he wondered how Drexter was faring. Tyndor must be about twelve miles up—less, perhaps, from Connel, where *Kestrel* had been moored—but with a breeze as light as this it might take him three or four hours to get there. That was a pity; but it had its brighter side. The yawl could loiter in any advantageous spot without exciting suspicion. From the heights of Morvern this probably looked like a flat calm.

The *Lochinvar* was turning to port now, round Duart Point and into the Sound of Mull, and Morvern drew steadily nearer. It looked empty and desolate.

They stopped at Craignure, in Mull, landed some mailbags and a shepherd, and glided off again. This time, however, they made for the north side of the sound, and in a few minutes came in sight of a little loch, its steep sides thickly and beautifully wooded. At its mouth was a small pier on which stood a postman, a policeman, a pier master, and a collie. "Lochaline," said someone conversationally, and Colin felt a slight thrill of anticipation. He had reached the last lap of his course. He was landing in Morvern.

Two other men were landing there also, apparently—a tall, gaunt fellow with unruly red hair and the face of an ascetic, and a bull-necked, thickset individual with abnormally long arms and a face like a punching bag.

Ill-assorted as they were, they were obviously together, and Colin wondered what their relationship might be. Master and man, presumably, though the thickset gentleman looked anything but a valet. A rich "eccentric"

and his keeper, perhaps? Or—interesting thought—a latter-day saint and his bodyguard? He determined to find out.

They were alongside now, and Colin, following the quaint pair up the gangway onto the wooden pier, found himself being studied intently and indeed almost rudely by the thickset man.

A large Solwing Thirty, twin of the one he had seen in Oban, was standing on the road behind the pier, and to this the two made their way. Colin, having no mind to follow yet awhile, made believe to be tying a lace until they had driven away. Then he stood and watched while the pier master cast off the *Lochinvar's* ropes from the bollards and the little vessel continued on her way down the sound toward Tobermory.

The policeman departed on a bicycle and the postman went off pushing a red mail cart. Colin approached the pier master.

"A grand day," he said.

"It is that."

"Have you had much of this weather lately?"

"Not near enough. It's been fine the last three days, though, and it looks pretty settled today. Though I wouldn't like to speak for tomorrow."

"I hope it holds for the next week or so anyway. I'm hoping to do a bit of walking."

"Aye, aye? Ah well, you'll get plenty of that in these parts, and it's about all you *will* get."

"So I believe. Er—this'll be the road to Clanachie, I take it? I understand it's about eight miles?"

"That's right. Clanachie, is it? You wouldn't be Mr. MacLean's nephew that he's expecting?"

"Yes," said Colin, "I am," for that was the fiction on which he and MacCallum had decided. "How did you know?"

"Och, Dougie the post was telling me Mr. MacLean had a telegram about it this morning, and I just thought it would likely be you. We don't get so many strangers here, you know."

"I don't suppose you do," said Colin, and seized the opening. "Which reminds me—that red-headed chap who came ashore with me—I'm almost certain I've seen him before somewhere. You don't happen to know who he is?"

"Him? That is Mr. Sewell, that has Tyndor. An English body. Man, if you had spoken to him he would very likely have given you a lift in his motorcar, for he goes through Clanachic."

"I think I'd rather walk," said Colin. "It's healthier." And he smiled as he thought how grimly true that was.

The first three of his eight miles lay along the wooded side of Loch Aline, and were very lovely—except underfoot. But Colin had small thought now for scenery. His mind was working fast on the immediate past and the immediate future.

His talk with the pier master had made two things obvious: one, that his coming was generally known (and, used though he was to the speed with which news travels in rural districts, he was rather surprised at that); the other, that if Colonel Stanley *was* at Tyndor his arrival must have been noted by the pier master—unless he had been ferried over from Appin and hoisted or prodded up from the beach. He wished he had asked about it and decided to make inquiries as soon as possible. In a district where the contents of telegrams became common knowledge within a few hours, surely someone must have noticed an unwilling arrival at the big house, if such there had been.

From that he turned to thinking of Sewell and his formidable bodyguard. Presumably the Oban Solwing had just dropped them when he saw it—perhaps they had traveled to Glasgow on the night train and then gone north by road—which meant that the man in the back, the man whose familiar face he had failed to place, had something to do with the prophet. That made his identification important, and for ten solid minutes Colin strove vainly to achieve it. Then he gave up, and began to review the whole case, as far as he knew it, from the

start.

Alan Drexter, attracted by Sewell's friendship with a notoriously unchristian M.P., had initiated an investigation of Christian Retrospect. Finding nothing of urgent interest therein, he had gone on leave, handing over the conduct of the investigation to Colonel Stanley. The latter, having presumably discovered something new and suspicious, had asked Jerry Gray to report on Sewell's movements when the prophet went to Cairo. In Cairo, Sewell had had a conference with an international financier who had a semi-fabulous reputation for backing *coups d'état*. Jerry had reported this, and had been murdered for doing so. Whereafter Colonel Stanley had been kidnaped, and attempts had been made on Colin's life, to prevent Jerry's report from reaching the right quarter. And now Sewell had retired to his much-publicized Retreat, where Stanley might or might not be awaiting him. What did it all add up to?

Very little, he was forced to admit. Beyond the fact that Zillah meant big money, and big money normally meant trouble, there was no hint of why Sewell and the financier had got together. That something big *was* in the wind, and that Stanley held a clue to it, the violent obstruction tactics of the gang made obvious. But as for guessing what it was— Had Jerry Gray, he wondered, said anything, any tiny hint which he might have ignored at the time, anything that might indicate which way the wind blew? It was quite possible that Stanley had told him something of his suspicions. Had he said anything? Deliberately Colin thought himself back on to the terrace of the Continental Hotel three nights before. He had been drinking brandy. A voice had said, "Sink me if it's not Colin Ogilvie!" He had looked up, and said, "Jerry, you old crook, sit down and have a drink!" Step by step he went through that conversation, hunting for any possible clue to the secret that lay so tantalizingly below the surface. And suddenly he stopped.

He had not recalled any pregnant remark, nor had he thought of a solution to the mystery, but he had achieved

something. He had placed the familiar face of the man in the back of Sewell's car. It was a swarthy face with a drooping cheek, and he had last—and first—seen it in Cairo. Its owner had been shadowing Jerry Gray an hour before he was murdered.

Rose Cottage proved to be the largest of Clanachie's nine houses. Like its fellows, it was whitewashed, and sat in a small garden beside the stony, dusty road. But two dormer windows in its sloping roof indicated the existence of a second floor, and its garden, a polychromatic farrago of bush, shrub, and bloom, was slightly bigger than the others. Its door, flanked by two laden fuchsias, was a rich and unexpected indigo, and there was a brass knocker in the shape of a boar's head.

Colin knocked, and was answered by a small, white-haired man in plus fours of a faded crotal. His face was rosy with the gloss of outdoor living, and his gray eyes were shrewd but kindly. "Come in, laddie, come in," said he, enthusiastically pumping Colin's hand. "Losh, but you've grown! And more like your mother than ever! Come within and give us your crack."

Slightly surprised, Colin followed him into the little lobby and closed the door. Immediately the rosy face became grave, though the gray eyes were dancing. "That was for the benefit of the neighbors," said his host. "*A roose de guerre*, as Pyecroft would say. I have publicized the prospective arrival of my nephew, so I welcome you accordingly. I got Duncan MacCallum's wire this morning. I gather there's some sort of a ploy afoot?"

Colin decided that he liked the little ex-schoolmaster. "There is, sir," he said. "Mr. MacCallum gave me a letter for you. Here it is. I think it more or less explains the position."

"I'll read it in a minute," said Mr. MacLean, "but we'll make ourselves comfortable first. Come you in here and sit down." He ushered his guest into a room which, at first sight, seemed to be completely filled with books. From floor to ceiling they reached, shelves and shelves

of them. But there were also two comfortable leather chairs flanking the peat fire, and into one of these he pushed Colin. "You'll want a wash, no doubt," he said, "but not just yet. Something to take the dust out of your throat first, I think. *Hospitis adventus, praesens sitis*—you'll remember the old tag." He produced a decanter and glasses from somewhere, and poured out two man-size measures. "Here you are, my lad," he said. "See how that tastes. *Slainte!*"

"Slaintel!" said Colin, and drank. It was liquid poetry. "That," he said, "is about the best whisky I've ever tasted."

"It's not too bad," Mr. MacLean admitted. "It's a friend of mine that makes it, up Borrodale way. He brings me a bottle or two now and then. After dark." His lively eyes expressed a cheerful contempt for the Excise Department and all its works. "Man, I'm glad you arrived when you did, Mr. Ogilvie. I was just wanting a drink myself, and—*Is sona cuid an comuinn*. You have the ancient tongue, I trust?"

"Only a word or two, I'm afraid," Colin confessed.

"A pity. It's a grand tongue, the Gaelic. The best in the world for martial poetry, and second only to Italian for making love. And now let's see what Duncan's got to say for himself."

While his host read MacCallum's letter, Colin sipped the excellent malt whisky and reflected that, for once, he seemed to have fallen on his feet. Apart from MacLean's obviously hospitable nature, his ready acceptance of an unknown "nephew," and his childish delight in the "ploy" that was afoot made his home the best possible base for Colin's operations.

MacLean laid down the letter and looked up. "So that's it?" he said. "You suspect that my saintly neighbor isn't all that he seems to be—that he's got a black side as well as a white side, like MacIain Ghearr's boat? Well—a—well! And now, Mr. Ogilvie tell me how I can best serve you. My bachelor establishment—plus one very accommodating housekeeper—is yours to command. As

am I. So just tell me what you want."

Colin sat up. "Well, sir," he began, but got no further, for the door opened and a plump, pleasant-faced little woman in black, her gray hair done in an old-fashioned bun, bounced in.

"Your tea's ready, Mr. MacLean," she announced.

"Ah, Mrs. Macquarrie, let me introduce Mr. Ogilvie. This, Mr. Ogilvie, is the benevolent despot who orders the evening of my days. Not that I'm not master in my own home, mind you, but *impera parendo* was ever a sound motto where the ladies are concerned."

Mrs. Macquarrie acknowledged Colin's bow with a friendly smile. "He talks an awful lot of nonsense, Mr. Ogilvie," she said. "Do you like your eggs turned?"

Five minutes later the two men sat down to high tea, that uncompromising northern meal which challenges all the laws of dietetics and, for some reason unknown, emerges victor. This particular tea was high to the point of loftiness, for it started with finnan haddocks, went on to bacon and eggs, and culminated in oatcakes and cheese, home-baked scones and fresh butter and jam, seed cake, shortbread, and chocolate biscuits. It was a very monarch among meals, and Colin felt at its finish that he would never rise again. But his host, spry as ever, led the way back to the study. And there, in the mellow glow of an oil lamp, the decanter set on an occasional table between them, and the peat fire smoldering at their feet, they got down to business.

Mr. MacLean listened in silence, but with steadily growing interest, as Colin told his tale. At the end he drew a deep breath and expelled it slowly. "Well! Well! Well!" he said. "Well! Well! Well! An amazing story, Mr. Ogilvie, and a promise of no little excitement. I am more delighted than ever that Duncan thought of sending you here. Now let me think." He thought; absent-mindedly refilling his guest's glass and his own the while. "Yes. The physical watching of Tyndor you'll be doing yourself, and better than I could. Young legs for the high hill, as they say, and it's high enough round Tyndor

in all conscience. I'll give you one or two tips on your route before you leave. As for myself, I suggest that I might ask a casual question here and there and find out if there's anyone noticed anything unusual the last day or two—particularly anything that might have been your Colonel Stanley arriving. It'll be funny if I don't pick up some sort of gossip."

"It will," said Colin, and told him of the pier master's greeting. The little schoolmaster laughed.

"Mind you," he said, "that was partly my doing. When I got Duncan's wire about this mythical nephew I guessed there was something in the wind so I told Dougie, the post, all about it. And a fine story I made of it too." He chuckled. "You work in a bank in London, and you've come up here to recover from a nervous breakdown that's left you very shy of meeting strangers. So everyone will think they know who you are and nobody will interfere with you."

Colin congratulated him on his foresight and then, for half an hour, they discussed local topography and weather, and as much as his host knew (it was quite a lot) of household and habits at Tyndor.

He learned, too, the origin of the name. "Tyndor," MacLean told him, "is an Anglicized form of a Gaelic original, just like Tyndrum. In this case the old name was *Tigh-an-dorcha*—the House of Darkness. And a fitting name, too, by all accounts. The lords of the isles had it six hundred years ago, and a darker lot of— Eh? Oh yes, the present house is only nineteenth century, and an ugly big excrescence it is. Clarkson, the coal millionaire, built it. But it's right on the site of the old one, so if the *genius loci* is still active we may see a few more dark deeds there yet. Here's hoping, anyway."

By nine o'clock the traveling, the meal, and the whisky had had their joint and inevitable effect, and Colin, yawning prodigiously, retired upstairs to the neat little room, sloping-roofed and friendly, that was his for his stay. By five past nine he was fathoms deep in sleep.

It was the last he was to enjoy for some time.

Chapter Eight

MOVEMENTS IN MORVERN

DAY DAWNED EARLY AND BRIGHT—too bright for a settled outlook, Colin reflected, as he buckled on kilt and sporran at his open window, breathing the while great lungfuls of air that blew fresh from the peaks to mingle pleasantly with the fragrance of Mr. MacLean's roses and the smell of the kippers that Mrs. Macquarrie was frying downstairs. There would probably be rain before night. He hoped it would not be very soon, for the prospect of lying out on a wet hillside for several hours was uninviting.

Nevertheless his spirits were high as he set out from the cottage and followed the road northward. Nine hours' sleep, perfect health, mountain air, and a large breakfast make a combination difficult to depress. Colin found himself whistling like a schoolboy.

A mile beyond Clanachie, MacLean had told him, the road forked, the left-hand path going on to Kingairloch while the right-hand one led to Tyndor. It led *only* to Tyndor, incidentally, so he might be better advised to parallel it than to tread it—at least for the last couple of its four undulate miles. Early though it was—his watch said twenty to seven—there might be those about whom he would do well to avoid.

He found the road junction, marked by a Celtic cross, half covered with moss but still honoring St. Moluag, and turned eastward. The sun, shining right in his eyes, made observation difficult, but his general impression was one of barrenness. There was not a tree within sight, not even a whin bush, and occasional bare or scantily covered rocks stood out of the green-brown moorland. It was certainly bleak country and, worse still, it offered very little concealment. As against that he seemed to be the only soul alive in it.

At half past seven he struck off the road and, moving southeastward, soon lost sight of it. He held that line for half a mile, however, and then, feeling pretty certain that he was far enough afield, headed due east again. In half an hour or so he ought to reach the coast, somewhere to the south of Tyndor.

The going was really better than it had been on the unmetaled road. For the most part it was springy turf, with occasional stretches of mossy rock on the crests and bog in the hollows. He saw wild yellow iris in the more sheltered spots, and bog myrtle, and here and there the white feathery tufts of the *canach*, the Highland cotton sedge. Heather, of course, there was none, nor would there be for a couple of months. But the little bells of the pale bog heather did their best to make up for it. Overhead, wild and clear, the whaups were shrilling.

He smelled the sea before he saw it, but only just before. A wave of salt air, a scramble up a mossy brae, and Loch Linnhe was glinting fifteen hundred feet below him. He dropped flat on the turf and looked around.

The ground fell away sharply from the ridge on which he was lying and sloped down to the water's edge at an angle of about sixty degrees. Straight ahead, perhaps two miles from the shore, was the northern end of Lismore, with something that looked like a quarry on it. And on the near side of the island, in a tiny cove, a small yacht rode at anchor. Colin took out his binoculars and studied her. Yes—green hull, canoe stern, mainmast, and mizzen—it was *Kestrel* all right, and a trim little craft she was. Sturdy enough for sea work—she had an eight- or nine-foot beam, he estimated—but still dainty enough to delight the eye. Presumably Tyndor was visible from where she lay. He wondered if Drexter had seen anything of interest yet.

Tyndor, however, was certainly not visible from where he himself lay, so, reconnoitering each crest before crossing it, he made his way slowly northward. And in ten minutes he suddenly saw it.

He was looking down into a corrie of sorts, a circular

depression about half a mile in diameter, surrounded by hills on all save its seaward side. There, on a relatively small patch of level ground, stood the House of Darkness. It faced east. In front of it was a depressed-looking croquet lawn, its seaward side flanked by a low wall beyond which the ground sloped steeply down to the shore. Behind it the thin line of the road wound up the side of the bowl and disappeared over the crest.

Architecturally, Tyndor was a shocker, a drab gray welter of towers and turrets, battlements and bartizans, Gothic windows and mid-Victorian chimneys. Some attempt had been made to create an ornamental garden around it, but without much success. And a glaringly modern asbestos-sheeted garage at the back did nothing to help. All in all, Colin was rather disappointed. The House of Darkness, he felt, should have been menacing and mysterious. Instead, it was merely messy.

He skirted the rim of the bowl for fifty yards, and found a little hollow from which he could observe without, he hoped, himself being seen. And there he settled down to wait.

At nine o'clock a man in chauffeur's uniform appeared from the back premises, opened the garage, and brought out the black Solwing. He ran the engine for a while, and then drove off up the road. Shopping, perhaps? Or possibly going to Lochaline to meet the morning boat—for MacLean had told him that, in addition to the *Lochinvar*, the Oban-Iona steamer called there daily. Colin hoped this latter guess was correct. It would be interesting to see what sort of house guests Sewell had at his retreat.

At half past nine a little red-funneled steamer went past up the loch—the Oban-Fort William boat probably—and at ten the Solwing returned. It drove round to the front of the house, and a man came out to meet it. Colin swung his binoculars onto the scene, and recognized his thickset friend of yesterday, now garbed in servile black that suited him not at all. He opened the car door and bowed slightly as a brunette in a Bond Street suit and

four-inch heels stepped out. She was tall, slim, and glamorous, and about as appropriate as a ghillie in the Ritz. Colin repressed a vulgar desire to whistle, and remembered the blushing Mr. Highway. So the saint's meditations were not, after all, confined to things of the spirit. Apparently his views on life were patriarchal rather than Pauline. Oh well, good luck to him. You would need some sort of light relief in the House of Darkness. He fell to thinking of Kay again, and wondered what she was doing; and, more important, who she was doing it with. She had hit him harder, he realized, than any other girl he had ever met.

After that, trade slackened. Someone shook a duster out of a window at half past eleven, and a few minutes later a message boy cycled over the crest, delivered a parcel at the back door, and departed eating something that looked like cake. Otherwise, not a mouse stirring.

By noon the promise of the early brightness had been fulfilled. The sky was overcast, and the even surface of the loch had become wind mottled, though there was still no breath blowing on the heights. *Kestrel* came into sight, heading northward under a mainsail and jib. Colin put his glasses on her and saw Drexter, in a sweater and slacks, smoking peacefully in the cockpit aft. Presumably he had decided that lying at anchor in a fair wind looked suspicious, and was stretching his sea legs accordingly.

Then, with a suddenness that was really startling, mist closed in. One minute the visibility was ten miles; the next, it was ten yards. And five minutes after that Colin could not see two feet in front of him.

MacLean had warned him of the Morvern mists—had told him how a dense blanket would settle on one particular level while above and below remained perfectly clear. And there was an old song about it too—"As roll the mists on Morvern," or something of the sort. But even at that he was startled. It was thick, impenetrable mist, and it had rolled up in no time at all. Slightly damp, and cut off from the rest of the silent world, Colin

decided to have lunch.

He ate three of the six large roast-beef sandwiches Mrs. Macquarrie had given him, drank a mathematical half of his flaskful of bootleg nectar, and composed his soul in patience to await a change in the weather.

It came shortly after three, when the mist lifted as quickly as it had come down, fading before a slight but welcome breeze. Tyndor still stood gaunt and deserted, and *Kestrel* had disappeared. Colin stretched himself carefully and systematically, like a cat, and wondered when, if ever, something would happen.

At three-fifteen a rather lumpy girl in a homemade dress and a bright red hat appeared round the back of the house, wheeling a bicycle. This she mounted, somewhat clumsily, and made off, her left hand holding her short skirt firmly down to her fat knees, which, as there wasn't a soul in sight, argued an innate and highly commendable sense of modesty. Colin yawned, and debated the advisability of calling it a day.

And then he noticed something. Four miles away, over near the Appin shore, a motor launch was heading westward. The glasses showed three occupants, an obvious boatman and two equally obvious passengers. She was making straight for him, and her bow wave argued a healthy speed.

He lowered the glasses, and saw something else. *Kestrel*, now under jib, mainsail, mizzen, and topsail, had come into sight again. She was running with the wind on her starboard quarter, on a course that converged on that of the launch, and would shortly bring her dangerously close to it. Colin grinned. Drexter, "pottering about" with seeming aimlessness, was keeping a very keen eye on the seaward approaches. Whoever the visitors might be—and they certainly seemed to be heading for Tyndor—the baronet was going to have a pretty close view of them before they landed.

In fact the yacht rocked through the wake of the launch with less than ten-fathom clearance. A couple of minutes later she came about and went off on the port

tack. The launch meanwhile had disappeared from sight as she came close inshore.

She reappeared shortly, heading back for Appin, and there was now only one man aboard. Colin watched the low wall at the edge of the slope in front of the house and waited. He had to wait quite a while, and when the two men did come over the top they were clearly out of breath. The smaller of the two said something, and stooped as if recovering his wind. The other stopped—impatiently, it seemed—and eventually urged him forward. Together they crossed the croquet lawn to the front door.

Through his glasses Colin saw that the taller man was about forty, with an aristocratic nose, a close-clipped black mustache, and a pugnacious jaw. The smaller was twenty years older, and his rather straggly mustache was white. Both were well-dressed, in the manner of professional men, and both carried suitcases. They disappeared into the house.

After that, nothing happened at all. The breeze died as the sun went down, and he saw *Kestrel* making slow work of her run up the loch to the rendezvous at King-airloch. But save for a few lighted windows, there was no sign of life from the house. Therefore at half past eight Colin, his sandwiches finished and his flask emptied two hours before, decided to make for home. He wanted to learn before he met Drexter what, if anything, MacLean had found out. For he had the beginnings of a plan in mind.

The walk back was slow at first but, as the action loosened his stiffened joints, it grew faster and more enjoyable. The evening was cool and light, the going pleasant; and the last mile was cheered by the thought of the welcome that he felt sure awaited him.

Nor was he in error. Mr. MacLean, his eyes alight with the sheer joy of living, produced the decanter before his guest was even seated. "*Nunc est bibendum*, Mr. Ogilvie," he said firmly. "A dram is the best prologue, as they say. We'll talk in due course." But it was a very

short time indeed before the news that was obviously within him came tumbling forth.

"I never realized, Mr. Ogilvie, what a talent I have for detection. But I've been doing it all day as to the manner born." He smiled happily. "And unobtrusively to boot—long ears and a short tongue, as the saying is, and the facts came out by themselves."

"The facts in question being?"

"Firstly, that Colonel Stanley's in the house."

"You're certain of that?"

"Morally. Peter Rankin, the carrier, gave me a lift down to Lochaline and I had a crack with Lamont the pier master. He tells me that three men arrived by the morning boat yesterday and went off in the Tyndor car. Two of them were big, strapping fellows, he says, but the other was an oldish chap who seemed to be ill—'walked like a somnambulance' was Lamont's phrase, which I take to mean that he was in a daze."

"Drugged, probably."

"As like as not. Anyway, his description fitted what you told me of the colonel—very tall, military mustache, stiff leg, and so on—and the two younger fellows were half carrying him, which suggests that he wasn't a free agent."

"Did nobody think it funny?"

"Apparently not. The policeman did speak to them, but they said the old man was a very bad sailor and went like this if he even saw a boat, let alone traveled in one. As the old chap was looking pretty green, that seems to have satisfied everybody."

"Reasonably enough, I suppose. Well, that certainly looks as if they've got him at Tyndor."

"There's confirmation from another source, but I'll come to it later. *Der Weg der Ordnung, ging er auch durch Kummer, er ist kein Umweg.* Let us take things in their chronological order."

He paused as the door opened and Mrs. Macquarrie entered. She bore a tray on which stood an enormous bowl of steaming broth, a loaf, and half a cold boiled

chicken.

"He would talk to you all night and never think of offering you anything but whisky, Mr. Ogilvie," she said. "And you with nothing warm inside you all day." She set the tray on the small table. "If you want any more come through and ask for it." And with an unconvincing scowl at MacLean she bounced out.

"*Mea culpa*," said the little man strickenly. "I should have thought of food." Colin, spoon in hand, reassured him, and begged him to continue.

"Right," said MacLean. "Where was I?"

"Taking things in their chronological order."

"Ah, yes. Well, just as I'd finished collecting my information from Lainont, the Iona steamer came in. And what do you think came ashore?"

"A honey in a pale beige creation and high heels?"

Mr. MacLean's face fell comically. "Oh," he said flatly. "Of course you would see her when she arrived at the house."

"Only from a distance," said Colin quickly. He felt sorry for the little man—he had so palpably hoped to burst a bombshell, and it had fizzled like a damp squib. "I didn't really get much time to study her."

"She's a very striking young woman," said his host. "Trent, her name is—Miss Avril Trent. She's an actress."

"How the dickens do you know that?"

"She told me," said Mr. MacLean simply, and completely regained his happiness at Colin's obvious bewilderment. "She told me in the car coming up. She gave me a lift as far as Clanachie, you see."

For a moment Colin was silent. Then he began to laugh helplessly. "Oh, dear," he said at last. "What a gorgeous piece of nerve! Send out a listening patrol and it comes back in enemy transport—and a staff car at that. Mr. MacLean, I congratulate you. I wish I had been at your school."

Avril Trent, it seemed, was paying her first visit to Scotland, and thought it too wonderful. Christian Retrospect, which she also thought too wonderful, had always

interested her, and when its prophet had offered her the privilege of sharing (with lots of other guests, of course, nothing shady) the Spartan simplicity of his retreat, she had thought it too, too wonderful altogether.

"A flashy trull," Mr. MacLean summed up with unexpected coarseness. "If the Spartan simplicity doesn't include champagne she'll probably die of thirst. Incidentally, she's got the bedroom next to Sewell's and there's a connecting door."

"For Pete's sake!" Colin was really startled. "You mean she told you that on the strength of an eight-mile car ride? Well! I used to think *I* was a fast worker, but—"

"No, no, no, Mr. Ogilvie. Miss Trent didn't tell me that. I got it from little Janet MacClymont—together with some things of greater import." He elaborated. Little Janet MacClymont—she proved to be the lumpy girl Colin had seen on her bicycle—was a maid at Tyn-dor. This being her afternoon off, she had spent it as she normally did, visiting her widowed mother in Clanachie. MacLean, who knew her habit, had dropped in at the mother's cottage about four, had been stayed with tea and scones, and had learned many interesting things about the Sewell household.

Of these quite the most interesting centered round the invalid guest. This gentleman—he was referred to as "the professor"—occupied the Rob Roy suite, and had not stirred from it since his arrival the previous morning. His meals were taken to him by one or other (and sometimes both) of the two menservants he had brought with him, and no other member of the staff was allowed even to approach the suite on pain of instant dismissal without character. Miss MacClymont suspected that the professor was really mad, and that the two big menservants were actually male nurses—an opinion which MacLean had done nothing to remove.

"So that's how they're doing it," said Colin. "Well, it's simple enough to be effective, I suppose. Those who're in the know allow the others to think there's a lunatic in the house—I'll bet that theory of your friend

Janet's is an inspired one—so nobody goes near him and everything in the garden is lovely. Quite. Mr. MacLean, you said last night that you'd been all over Tyndor while it was lying empty, before Sewell rented it. Have you any idea whereabouts the Rob Roy suite is?"

MacLean looked at him, and his eyes narrowed. "*Mo chreach!*" he said. "You're not thinking— You don't intend—"

"Look," said Colin. "Colonel Stanley knows something that's highly dangerous to the gang. We don't. Isn't it pretty obvious that the sooner we find out what it is, the better?"

"Aye, that's logical enough. What isn't logical is the idea that you can just break into a big place like that, full of toughs who're probably armed, and—"

"The bigger the place the easier to find an entrance. Oh, I know it's a risk, a deuce of a risk, but if someone doesn't take it, what are we going to do? The police wouldn't raid the house on the strength of our suspicions—and remember, though we're morally certain, we've got no real proof—and even if we persuaded them to call and ask to interview 'the professor' they'd certainly find that he'd just been given his sleeping draught, or something. No, there's only one chance, and that's for someone to break in and get in touch with Stanley—not necessarily rescue him—that would probably be impossible anyway—but talk to him, find out what he knows, and *then* go to the police with something definite."

Mr. MacLean was silent for a time. He shook his head, sighed, and at length looked up. "Man," he said, "I wish I were forty years younger! Aye, Mr. Ogilvie, I can tell you how to find the Rob Roy suite."

It was barely eleven when Colin swung down the steep wooded path to Kingairloch side. The night was not yet dark, but all color had died out of the landscape, so that the firs, the still loch, and the little yawl lying offshore had something of the quality of an etching.

As he reached the loch side a dark figure moved out

from the shadow of a tree and Drexter's voice spoke guardedly. "That you, Ogilvie?"

"In person."

"You're dead on time. Good man. Let's go aboard where we can talk."

He led the way along the shore, and Colin followed. A little tub of a dinghy was drawn up on the shingle, and into this, when Drexter had shoved it off, they climbed warily. The baronet lifted one of the short oars, slipped it over the stern, and proceeded to scull gently. With unexpected speed they moved out toward *Kestrel*.

A miniature ladder brought them on deck, and Drexter, loosely knotting the dinghy's painter to the low rail, preceded his visitor down the companionway. "Watch your head," he warned, and Colin ducked into a surprisingly spacious saloon. It contained two sizable settees separated by a narrow table, on which Drexter proceeded to lay a bottle, a siphon, and a couple of glasses which he took from a neatly built-in drink shelf at the after end of the starboard settee.

"This," said Colin, looking around him, "is amazing. I'd no idea you had so much room below deck."

"All Strange's boats are like that," said the other. "He designed for *Lebensraum* as much as sailing quality. There's a forecastle forward of this—through that sliding door—where you can sleep a hand if you carry one. The galley's to starboard of the companionway, just outside there, and the lamp and oilskin lockers to port. He didn't waste a lot of space, did he? Say when."

Colin said when, and a little later said cheers. Then they got down to business.

Drexter had little to contribute, but that little was interesting. The two passengers in the motorboat (whose owner had cursed him heartily for his lack of seamanship) were Mr. Guy Manling, M.P., and Doctor Abel Partridge. The latter—he was the one with the straggly white mustache—was a high-up member of Christian Retrospect's Governing Council, and reputedly Sewell's right-hand man.

"I've never known him to be out of London at the same time as Sewell before," Drexter concluded, "so it looks as if something pretty big is in the air. And now, let's hear your side of the business."

Colin told all he had seen and all that Mr. MacLean had contrived to pick up. His hearer chuckled at the Avril Trent episode, and raised an eyebrow at the story of the invalid professor. "So!" he said when Colin had finished. "I *knew* they had the poor old devil here. I wonder what they're doing to him. You know, I've got a shrewd suspicion that this is where Drexter, A., goes into the burglary business."

"For Drexter, A., read Ogilvie, C., throughout," said Colin, "and you've got just what I was going to suggest."

Drexter shook his head. "Sorry," he said, "but I can't let you. You see— Have you ever burgled a house?"

"Of course not. But—"

"I have. Twice. And it's tricky work. I know you've got the necessary guts, but I can't risk your inexperience. Too much depends on this. Besides, I know Stanley, and you don't. No, Ogilvie, thanks for the offer, but I'd better do it myself."

"Half a sec. MacLean's given me full directions for finding the Rob Roy suite, and I've got your description of Stanley. So that's all right. But that's not the point. The point is that, though you may be a better burglar than I am, you're in charge of this investigation and it's essential that you remain free. Your second-in-command is a prisoner—it's sheer insanity to risk becoming one yourself."

"But the police can—"

"The police won't act till we've something definite to tell them—either that we've actually seen Stanley in durance vile, or, if the attempt fails, that So-and-so went into Tyndor at midnight and hasn't come out again."

"Precisely. If I'm captured, you tell the police."

"Who may or may not believe me. On the other hand, if *I'm* captured, *you* tell the police, who'll believe you right away. And act on it."

"Why should they believe me any more than you?"

"Because you're a responsible Home Office official, for one thing, and also because you're a baronet. Don't underrate the snob value of your title. Britain's quite as bad—"

"Oh, I know all about the snob value of a title. I've been getting theater seats and hotel rooms on the strength of mine for years. Not to mention credit in shops. But even allowing that—"

"One more thing. And it's the most important of the lot. If the one who breaks in—whichever of us it is—is caught, the other has not only got to *tell* the police, he's also got to take command of them for the twelve hours or so before MacCallum can get here. And they'll be extremely vital hours. The local inspector may be a very good man for all I know, but he's unlikely to take kindly to orders from me—even if I were capable of giving them—whereas you, being in the Home Office, are really in a way his superior officer. Aren't you a justice of the peace, too, incidentally?"

"Yes, blast you! Oh, I suppose you're right—I *am* more useful outside, and you're probably quite as capable of burgling the place as I am. All the same— No. You're perfectly right. I'd like to have tackled it myself, but it's better your way. How do you propose to get there?"

"Over the hills, avoiding the road. I studied the ground pretty thoroughly this afternoon—I'd nothing else to do—and I saw a sort of track leading down from the ridge opposite my O.P. The north side of the bowl, that is. This side."

"Why not approach from the sea? Then you're only liable to observation for a few seconds while you cross that croquet lawn."

"You mean you could put me ashore there? But surely— What does *Kestrel* draw?"

"Five feet. But I shouldn't attempt to use her, even if there was enough wind, which there isn't. We can pull round in the dinghy. It's barely three miles. I'll land you right below the house."

"That," said Colin, "would be just perfect." And they got down to details.

Drexter would put Colin ashore at the foot of the sheep track which Manling and Partridge had climbed that afternoon. Thereafter he would return to the yacht. Colin meanwhile would break into Tyndor, endeavor to talk with Colonel Stanley, or at least verify his presence, and then make his way back to Kingairloch to report. If he failed to appear there by 5 a.m., Drexter would go to the police and start things moving.

"That should give you plenty of time," said the baronet. "It's only dark from about midnight till three—and not so very dark at that, though thank heaven there's no moon—so you'll have to be clear of the house by three at the latest. Allowing two hours for a stealthy and circuitous getaway, five is the very latest that I'll expect you. After that—"

"You can call the cops and order lilies."

"That's probably the simple truth," said Drexter grimly. "Which reminds me. Have you got a gun?"

"No."

"I'll give you my Colt, then."

"No, thanks. Never liked guns. Noisy things. And I'm a lousy shot anyway."

"You can't go in there unarmed, man. I'm not suggesting that you shoot the place up, but they're a desperate bunch, as you know, and if they get the drop on you—"

Colin grinned, slipped two fingers of his right hand up his left sleeve, and then withdrew them. A dagger glittered wickedly in his right palm. Its short ivory hilt was a graven image of Amaterasu and its blade was a six-inch sliver of tempered steel. "I got that in Burma," he said, sliding it back up his sleeve, "from a Japanese gentleman who—had no further use for it. I call it Sammy—short for Samurai. If you happen to have an ace of spades you don't want—"

"I'll take your word for it," said Drexter. "Do you always carry that thing about with you?"

"Haven't worn it for weeks," said Colin. "But somehow, tonight, I felt cold without it. Do you know that feeling?"

"Yes," said Drexter soberly, "I do. It generally means trouble. Come on."

On the grounds that he knew the dinghy, and that anyway Colin would want all his energy later, Drexter took the oars while his passenger sat in the stern. The little tub was very light in the water, and they made good speed round the point and into the dark length of Linnhe. After a couple of miles, however, the rower eased up and started to pull a silent fisherman's stroke. "Sound carries so far on water," he whispered, "and we don't want to take any chances."

It was practically dark now, and Colin could see nothing to starboard but the unbroken black mass of Morvern. His companion seemed to know the coast intimately, however, for, after a series of casual glances into the gloom, he backed water slowly with his left, rowed two full strokes, and quietly shipped his oars. There was dead silence, save for the lapping at the bow, and then the faintest of crunches as they grounded very gently on the shingle.

Carefully Colin clambered ashore, bending his head close to Drexter's as he passed. "See you at five," he murmured, "with the inside story."

"If you don't," breathed the baronet, "you'll see me at six with a posse. Good luck." Lightened by some 190 pounds, the dinghy floated off, and Colin stepped delicately over the shingle to the rough grassy base of the slope.

His eyes, by this time fully accustomed to the darkness, soon found the sheep track and, patting his sleeve to make sure that Sammy was ready for action if required, he started to climb.

The incline at most places was steep but possible, but once or twice—whether because he had strayed from the track or because the Morvern sheep used helicopters—he came to minor overhangs and had to traverse to easier

ground. And once he lost his footing altogether and rolled down 30 uncomfortable feet of scree.

He lay still, after that, for what seemed like hours. But there was no sounding of alarms above, and eventually he pushed on.

But the fall had shaken him, and his eyes and ears began to play tricks. A small hump, briefly skylined, became a crouching man. The susurrus of the water below was a soft-footed stalker. A falling stone, dislodged doubtless by his own ascent, meant the approach of enemies. Even the back of his neck began to tingle, though the chances of his being followed up a lonely hill face at midnight were, to put it mildly, remote. This, Colin told himself firmly, was the common or garden jitters, and must cease forthwith. If he *was* surrounded by hostile watchers, they could darned well declare themselves, until which time he would carry on.

By daylight, no doubt, the ascent was merely a stiff climb. But in darkness and attempted silence it became much more difficult, and by the time he had reached the little wall at the top—he halted just below it—Colin was distinctly out of breath. As he paused to recover it, he glanced at his watch. It was a quarter past twelve.

Gently, inch by inch, he raised his head over the wall and looked at Tyndor. One of its big ground-floor windows was still alight.

The curtains, moreover, were undrawn, and the light streamed brightly over the croquet lawn. *House of Darkness, be jigged*, Colin thought bitterly. He might as well hope to crawl unobserved across Piccadilly. A considerable detour was called for. Sighing, he began to make it.

When next he looked over the top he was well clear of the light area, but he was also a much greater distance from his objective. However, it was the lesser of two evils, so he chose it. Levering himself up and over the wall, he started a slow, regular crawl toward the dark outline of the house.

It felt longer, but in fact it was five minutes later that

he reached the drive which ran round the building. It occurred to him then to wonder—belatedly, he admitted—whether the household possessed a dog, and, if so, what he could possibly do about it. He had seen no sign of one all day, which made it likely that none existed. But there *might* be some yapping little brute who disliked fresh air and lived cooped up within, in which case things would be difficult. However, it was too late to worry about that. He must just hope for the best.

It was no part of Colin's plan to break in before the inhabitants were safely abed, and the front window indicated that some, at least, were still up. Unless, of course, they had forgotten to switch the lights off when they retired. He wondered, without profit, if this had actually happened. It would be unfortunate if he were to waste any of his all-too-short time for an empty room.

At a quarter to one he decided that he could wait no longer without knowing definitely one way or the other. It was risky—very risky. But then so was the whole enterprise. Slowly, silently, hugging the wall, he moved toward the light.

A yard or two short of it he dropped on all fours and inched his way forward until his nose was against the wood of the sash. Cautiously, and crossing his fingers, he peeped in, and quickly jerked back. The room was by no means empty. He had seen at least three people in it.

That would probably have satisfied a professional burglar, who would now have sat down patiently to wait. But Colin, mentally recapturing the glimpse he had had—it seemed to be an opulent if stodgy drawing-room—felt increasingly tempted to fill in a few more details. No one had seen him, obviously. Probably they were not looking anywhere near the window. And anyway, it was much easier to see into a lighted room than out of one. Knowing that he risked wrecking the whole show, but refusing to admit the fact, he moved in for a closer study.

There were **four people** in the room, and they were *not* looking at the window. They had evidently been sitting round the fire, but even as he watched they rose

to their feet, and he was able to identify them—Sewell, Manling, Partridge, and Avril Trent. The M.P. and the doctor were in dinner jackets. The prophet was in a velvet smoking-coat over a soft shirt. Miss Trent was in—but only just in—a riot of sequins.

The girl, apparently, was on the point of leaving. She smiled bewitchingly at Partridge and Manling, who bowed, and meaningly at Sewell, who frowned impatiently. Then, sleek, svelte, and superlative, she—no. “Went out” was inadequate. She Made her Exit. Colin wanted to clap.

He also wanted to know why Sewell had not followed her. If the prophet’s tastes were anything like his own, there must be some mighty powerful counterattraction. He strained his ears, but could hear nothing of the conversation within.

The three men had remained standing—a hopeful sign for Colin—but they seemed to be engaged in a serious and indeed almost violent argument. Had the Trent girl’s presence, perhaps, kept them from discussing their real business until now? If so, it was a blue lookout for the burglar. They would probably resume their seats and go on talking till dawn.

It seemed for a time, indeed, as if this dim foreboding might be realized, for Manling perched himself on the arm of a chair, and the elderly doctor actually sat down again. But Sewell remained on his feet, and suddenly, with a last defiant refusal—or so it looked to Colin—marched out of the room. His guests exchanged helpless glances, shrugged, and followed him slowly. More important, Manling switched off the light.

Colin, realizing abruptly that for five good minutes he had been in full view of anyone who cared to look toward the window, sat back on his heels and gave thanks for his escape. He must be much more careful in the hours ahead.

The extinction of the light, he decided, was his cue to start searching for an entrance. By the time he had found, reconnoitered, and forced one, everybody would

certainly be in bed, if not asleep. He set off for the back of the building.

Tyndor's architect had quite obviously thought only in terms of fronts—the sort of man, probably, who wore genuine pearl studs in a dickey—for the rear of the house presented a dismal array of flat-roofed single-story outcrops and annexes, mid-Victorian certainly, but very far from baronial. They were probably laundries, larders, and the like, and Colin ignored them in favor of the main building. He had no desire to burgle a scullery and find himself still shut off from the house by a bolted door.

It was some time before he came on his window, but when he did it was the housebreaker's dream: a small, four-paned square, its lower half opening upward, and closed with a catch which his penknife clicked back in seven seconds. There might, mind you, be a burglar alarm of some sort. Still— He cased up the frame and strained his ears. No alarm. Unless, of course, it was ringing in somebody's room—

He raised one knee to the sill, swung the other leg in, and squeezed carefully through. A quick flash of his tiny torch—a pen-shaped toy borrowed from MacLean—showed a bare stone passage, ending, a few feet to his right, in a door. He flicked off the light and quietly closed the window. For good or ill, he was inside the House of Darkness.

Chapter Nine

TROUBLE IN TYNDOR

WITH A SILENCE LEARNED from his Gurkhas, Colin moved along the passage. The door, his fingers told him, had neither lock nor handle, and he pulled it gently open. Its other side was covered with baize: a service door, clearly, giving on—what? He slipped through.

There was a faint flicker of light now, coming from a dying fire in a huge fireplace. This must be the hall. He risked a quick flash of his torch, and saw the thin beam play over dark paneling, kilted portraits, and antlered heads, and lose itself in the shadows of a railed gallery. Yes, this was the hall all right. He moved forward over rugs and polished oak.

The grand staircase, if MacLean's directions were correct, should lead up from somewhere on his right. He found it, and went up carefully. Twice it creaked under him and each time he halted, ears straining, but there was nothing to hear.

He reached the landing in good order and, leaving the grand staircase to continue its rather too public ascent, turned along the gallery on the south side of the hall. At the end of this, according to MacLean, a small winding turret stair led up to the next floor, that on which the late Mr. Clarkson had placed his four guest suites: the Bruce, the Wallace, the Bonnie Prince Charlie, and the Rob Roy. Above that were the mere bedrooms, and above that again slept the staff. Devoutly hoping that the staff did sleep, and soundly, Colin switched on his torch. A yard ahead was his turret stair.

Again he found two creaking treads and again his straining ears heard nothing untoward. A house like this, he reflected, must be full of cracks and creakings in the night. Probably if anyone did hear him they would think it merely the normal night noise of old furniture

and woodwork. It was a comforting belief.

He was in a carpeted corridor now, with six massive doors on its southern side. These should be the Wallace and the Rob Roy, for the two royal heroes were commemorated on the north side of the house. Rob Roy at the turret end, MacLean had said. Gently he tried the nearest door. It was locked. He moved on to the next. It was locked too.

This, of course, he had expected; and he had in his pocket an improvised contraption of copper wire with which, unless his boyhood skill had deserted him, he could pick most ordinary locks. But, just lest the incredible should have happened, he tried the third door of the suite.

The incredible *had* happened. The door was locked, all right, but the key had been left in the mortise.

For a moment Colin hesitated. Somewhere at the back of his brain was the conviction that all this was too easy. The little window in the service passage, the deserted hall, the unguarded door, and now the key, fortunately left in the lock. It might almost be that they were expecting him, that they had cleared the obstacles from his path so that he would be certain to reach his objective; that they were giving him, in a word, enough rope.

On the other hand, it might be perfectly all right. Anti-burglar precautions were far less common in the wild north than in the civilized south. Halls were normally deserted at one in the morning. Sentries were rarely posted outside the doors of ostensible invalids. And keys were frequently left in locks. If they were not expecting him—and so far as he knew they had no reason to connect the old schoolmaster's nephew with the troublesome messenger from Cairo, who in any event had been advertised as a hospital case after his treatment by Golding and Carter—then this was more or less what he would normally find. If they *were* expecting him—well, it would be just too bad. He turned the key cautiously, opened the door, held his breath, and went in.

Starlight from the window gave him his bearings and

let him see something of the room. It was large and lofty, and on one side stood a big four-poster bed such as Rob Roy never saw in all his hard, outlawed life. In it someone was breathing deeply. Colin tiptoed over, shaded his torch with his hand, and studied the face of the sleeper. It was Colonel Stanley, beyond a doubt—the military mustache, the close-cropped hair, the thin, aristocratic features, all were as Drexter had described them. The question now was, could he be wakened, or were they keeping him under a narcotic? He laid a finger on the sleeper's neck—it was an old shikari's trick for rousing a man silently—and saw the eyes flicker and stay open.

"I'm a friend," he whispered. "Sir Alan Drexter sent me."

The man in the bed peered up at what must have been a dark and dubious figure, but there was no trace of alarm on his face. "Who are you?" he asked, his voice no louder than Colin's had been.

"My name's Ogilvie. Jerry Gray's friend—from Cairo."

The colonel sat up. "Ah!" he said softly. "The man who was coming down to St. Leonards to see me. I've already had one false Ogilvie on the telephone. Is there any reason why I should accept *you* as genuine?"

"If I weren't genuine, why on earth should I be creeping into your room in the middle of the night?"

"You might wish to trap me into telling you what steps I have taken against your gang."

"Oh!" said Colin, and thought hard. That, after all, though it might be differently phrased, was really what he had come to do. "That's rather a fast one, sir. I *was* hoping to find out exactly what you'd been doing since Drexter went on leave, and in particular to see how you reacted to my message from Jerry. But as to establishing my identity— Well—"

"Let's have a look at you anyway," said the colonel. He switched on the bedside lamp and proceeded to examine his visitor minutely.

Colin, for his part, saw a handsome old man of sixty-

odd, with very intelligent eyes. He also saw the main bedroom of the Rob Roy suite in all its beauty. The carpet was MacGregor tartan. So were the curtains, cushions, and counterpane. The walls, half paneled, bore a row of very bad oil paintings. There was one of Rob Roy, one of Helen MacGregor, and four of landscapes in which, presumably, the great cateran had at some time lived, loved, fought, or stolen. He recognized Glen Gyle in one and Inversnaid in another. Stenciled round the wall in heavy gold, a couple of feet below the ceiling, were lines from Sir Walter Scott. *The moon's on the lake, and the mist's on the brae, and the Clan has a name that is nameless by day . . . We're landless, landless, landless, Gregalach . . . While there's leaves in the forest, and foam on the river, MacGregor despite them shall flourish forever!* He shuddered slightly and turned to Stanley. "What a hell of a room!" he said. The colonel smiled grimly.

"Almost thou persuadest me," he said. "You certainly don't look like one of the Sewell gang. I doubt if any of them would have had the imagination to wear a kilt. But if you're genuine, how the deuce did you get in here?"

"Broke in," said Colin, and stopped abruptly, his hand held up for silence. In the space that followed he could hear his watch ticking. At last he relaxed slightly, but his voice was very low when he spoke. "What's in that next room?" he breathed.

"Nothing, as far as I know. I suppose it's the sitting-room of the suite. The connecting door's locked."

"I thought I heard a noise in there." Again they stood silent, listening. Then the colonel shrugged.

"You probably did," he said. "This house is full of noises. It's the woodwork, I think."

"I expect you're right," said Colin. "I'm afraid I'm unusually nervy tonight. Look, sir, let's get out of here and go to Drexter. You don't trust me, reasonably enough, and I can't prove my honesty, so let's go to someone you do know." He kept his voice low.

The colonel looked at him curiously. "Suppose you give me your message first—the one from Jerry Gray," he said, no more loudly than Colin had spoken.

"Right. Jerry saw Sewell, and he *thought* Manling, attending some sort of conference at Zillah's house at Mena on Friday afternoon. Message ends."

"Zillah?" said the colonel and his eyes gleamed. "Zillah, by jove!" He drew a deep breath of satisfaction; and then his face become suddenly masklike. "I see," he said. "And you want to know how that ties in with the information I already have?" Suspicion was obvious in his voice.

"We do, but I'm not asking you to tell *me*. Come and tell Drexter."

The old man frowned. "If you're a Sewellite," he said, "you know this already. I can't come with you. They've taken away my artificial leg."

"Your—your artificial leg? Oh, hell! Of course. I'd forgotten."

"That I had one? Yes. And I'm quite helpless without it. Can't move a yard."

"That's a snag all right. Couldn't I help you somehow? Carry you, if need be?"

The colonel shook his head. "I'm nearly as big as you are," he said. "We'd never manage it. I don't suppose we'd even get out of the house."

"I don't suppose we would."

There was silence for a time. Then the colonel spoke, suspicion still patent in his tone. "Well, what do you suggest? That I tell you after all?"

"It's the obvious answer, sir, but I fully appreciate your caution. I suppose the only thing is for me to go back to Drexter, get the police, and raid the place."

"How long will that take?"

"Two—three hours, perhaps."

The colonel thought deeply. "This gang," he said, "has a tendency to do the unexpected at a moment's notice. Anything might happen in three hours. I wonder—" He frowned, then suddenly turned to Colin. "If

you're really Ogilvie," he said, "you must have got to my place at St. Leonards shortly after I left it. What did you find there?"

Colin described his arrival at The Chesters, the other listening keenly. After a minute he interrupted. "What was my ward wearing when you met her?" he asked.

Colin smiled reminiscently. "Not a lot," he said. "White shorts and a green sort of top piece. Very attractive."

The colonel nodded, and the recital continued, broken by further questions from time to time. What was the name of the servant? In which room was the telephone? What did Superintendent Brackett look like? Colin dealt effectively with each and saw the suspicion in his hearer's eyes grow less.

Stanley was shaken by the news that an attempt had been made to kidnap Kay, but cheered up at the knowledge that Scotland Yard was guarding her. And finally he stopped the recital. "I think that's enough," he said. "Just one test question. You say Kay took you up to Wellington Court for a drink while she packed. What did you drink?"

"Pink gin."

"What brand of gin was it?"

Colin frowned in concentration. What brand of gin had it been? He visualized the lounge of the flat, the drink cabinet, the bottle—a square-faced one with— Was it a blue label? Yes. "Mayer and Morton's," he whispered triumphantly, and the colonel smiled.

"Either you're genuine, Mr. Ogilvie," he said, "or your organization has supernatural abilities. I never bought Mayer and Morton's gin in my life till last week. Well, I'm going to assume that you're genuine and I'm going to talk. If anything *should* happen to me before you get back with the police, Alan will have something to go on anyway." He paused, marshaling his thoughts, and Colin found himself waiting with considerable excitement.

"Sewell and company," said the colonel at last, "are planning a colossal piece of sabotage. Two days after

Alan went on leave I learned, quite by chance, that one of the Christian Retrospect officials was a man who'd been mixed up in those I.R.A. bomb outrages in 1939. I thought it strange and did some investigating on these lines. I won't trouble you with details, but the results were staggering. At strategic points throughout the country, acting ostensibly as minor officials of the various regional and divisional centers, I located several very doubtful characters, and one or two of whom there was no doubt whatever. Two of them had been suspected—but never proved guilty, of course—suspected of having a hand in the Liverpool dock fires in 1946. At least one was a well-known agitator. Others were just general bad hats. I personally located seven. How many more there are, Lord knows. Maybe dozens, for I only had time to touch the fringe. I couldn't do anything about it, of course, for if we'd tackled them officially the obvious answer would have been that they were all repentant sinners who'd seen the light and were now engaged in good works."

"But—but surely Christian Retrospect seemed so innocuous—"

"And it *is* innocuous. That's the beauty of the thing. Ideologically, C.R. has nothing to do with the scheme at all, and the immense majority of its members know nothing about it. But it supplies a magnificent front for the crookery in the background. Sabotage on the scale they intend requires very careful organizing—and C.R. gives them the perfect link-up system between H.Q. and the units in the field. It's perfect because ninety-nine per cent of the time it's being used genuinely for a commendable purpose, and so nobody suspects the existence of the other one per cent."

"What sort of sabotage are they aiming at, sir?"

"There I'm less clear. All I could gather seemed to suggest that they were going to try and deal a concerted and crippling blow at Britain's export trade. A strike here, a bomb in the machinery there; a derailed train or a burned-out freighter somewhere else. All strategic points and all simultaneous, of course, on a prearranged date."

"But why, for Pete's sake?"

"Money, I imagine. Sewell may have some crazy notion that he's the instrument of the divine wrath or something, but the others are in it for money. If Britain's export trade could be temporarily paralyzed, she'd lose her overseas markets, and it would take years to win them back, as we learned after the war. A concerted coup like this would probably throw us out of gear just long enough to do the damage. We'd be in the soup and our rivals would be in clover. And presumably some of them are unscrupulous enough to be very generous to the men who put them there."

"But that would be a colossal undertaking. Surely you'd need a whole army corps, striking at the same time, to sabotage our entire export trade?"

"Of course you would. And that's the point at which I was stuck. I knew they could only be aiming at one, or perhaps two, particular industries; but I had no slightest clue as to which ones they might be. Which meant that I had no idea where the blow would fall, and therefore couldn't do anything to prevent it."

"You say you *had* no idea. Have you one now?"

"Yes. Or at least a lead to it. I knew that some very big financier must be behind the scheme, and now I know it's Zillah. That helps enormously. Zillah's mainly textiles and machinery, I think, but we've only got to get the stock market experts on to it to find out exactly. Presumably he'll have been selling out his British holdings and buying corresponding foreign ones. Of course he'll be employing a hundred different subsidiaries and nominees and intermediaries to cover up his tracks, but our fellows generally have a pretty shrewd idea of who's really behind what in these big deals, and what they don't know they'll be able to tease out. They'll trace the Zillah transactions all right. And once we know which stocks are concerned we'll know which industries are threatened—which actual firms, possibly—and we'll be able to act accordingly. It was the one clue I—"

He broke off abruptly, and in the split second that

followed Colin hurled himself across the room and got behind the big tartan curtain at the window. Someone was fiddling with the key of the door. He remembered that he had left it unlocked, and swore under his breath. Then he heard the door open, and got his eye to a chink in the curtain in time to see Sewell, his red hair wild and tousled, stride into the room. He was wearing turquoise pajamas under a purple silk dressing gown, and looked like a sunset. He also looked very worried, with a worry which apparently preoccupied him to the exclusion of any surprise at the unlocked door or the fact that the colonel was sitting up in bed with the light on.

"Hello, Stanley," he said jerkily. "Glad you're still awake. Want to talk to you."

"Yes?" said Stanley, carefully keeping his eyes from Colin's hiding place.

"Yes. I want—" He ran a hand through his hair and strode violently across the room. It was like an amateur actor playing a temperamental genius, save that it happened to be genuine. "I want to reason with you." His voice had lost its jerkiness and was almost mesmeric in its quality.

Colonel Stanley looked at him calmly. "I'll be glad to hear what you have to say," he said.

The prophet paced another couple of floor lengths, shook his hair back, and glared at the older man. "You're doing your best to ruin England!" he burst out.

"I am? My dear fellow—"

"You are. England has been a major power for three hundred and fifty years, and what has it brought her? War. Hardship, bloodshed, death. That's all. The standard of living goes down while the cost of it goes up, and a man has no time to regard his soul. We toil, we fight, we die, without ever being able to pause and think. We work, we worry, we win or we lose—but we never have time to feel. What do we pray? That God will confound our enemies and give us victory. What do we praise? The God of Battles. 'God of our fathers, known of old, Lord of our far-flung battle-line, Beneath whose awful

Hand we hold Dominion over palm and pine.* *That's what we worship! Moloch!*" He made a hopeless gesture and turned his back on his auditor.

Colonel Stanley started, as if he had come out of a dream. He looked curiously at the wild redheaded figure. "I don't quite see," he said gently, "how you can put the blame for that on me."

"You, your class, your type. The traditional empire builders. The dauntless heroes who plant the British flag on unscaled peaks and thereby push the British people down to unplumbed depths. The jingo caste. The salt of the earth, the backbone of the country—and its damnation."

Colin, listening, found himself lifted up on the wave of sound, lifted up and carried along with it. He shook his head as if the spell were physical. This, he told himself, was ordinary soapbox matter, though done in a far-from-soapbox manner. The man was saying nothing that hadn't been said a thousand times before; but the way he said it—No wonder Christian Retrospect had swept the country, if this was its prophet.

"Have you ever been in Sweden, Stanley?" The voice was low now, intimate and companionable, and very, very compelling. "It's what they call a second-class power. That means it hasn't got an army big enough to threaten its neighbors. It hasn't got a navy that can blockade its trade rivals. It hasn't got an air force that can kill and blind and maim a million babies who never heard of it. It hasn't got colonies or possessions or mandates or spheres of influence. It hasn't got ambitions and it hasn't got enemies. All it *has* got is decency and happiness and plenty and peace. A second-class power! My God, what are our standards, when we call that second class?"

And that, thought Colin, was pretty unanswerable. When you came to think of it, it did seem rather ridic-

*From "Recessional," from *The Five Nations*, by Rudyard Kipling, copyright, 1903, 1931. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. G. Bambridge and Doubleday & Company, Inc.

ulous to be a great power when the little ones got so much more for their money. Funny, he had never really thought before—

"It's also got Nobel's." The colonel's crisp, clean voice cut across the melodious flow. "I'm not prepared, Sewell, to argue the economic differences between an underpopulated agricultural country and an overpopulated industrial one, which I notice you ignore, but even if we allow that Sweden is a happier country than Britain. I don't see what it's got to do with me. My ancestors and my caste, as you call it, may have built up Great Britain, but you don't think I can knock it down again, do you?"

"You can help," said Sewell calmly; and Colin's gasp would have been heard by a less-preoccupied man. "We have a plan—I know you know something of it—a plan which in twenty-four hours can destroy the commercial juggernaut that our country has become. Without her export trade, Britain will drop back to the second rank—the rank of Sweden and Switzerland, of peace and dignity. *Human* dignity, Stanley—not national pride. She can become a nation of people—people with souls and the leisure to think about them—instead of a hurrying, worrying mass of automata struggling to exist when they ought to be learning to live."

"You have a plan to wreck part of our export trade. Yes? What then?"

"I've told you. We're forced to drop out of the world's squabbles. We're forced back on ourselves. We've found salvation."

"Ruin, more probably. Your ignorance of elementary economics, Sewell, is sublime. It's equaled only by your ignorance of history. Incidentally, a couple of industries does *not* constitute our entire overseas trade. You won't kill—you'll only maim. But one thing you've said interests me—very much. You said that I could help. You're surely not hoping to enroll me in your little band of traitors?"

The prophet made an impatient gesture. "Traitors!" he said scathingly. "Can't you rid yourself of the

vocabulary of the nineteenth century? We are *not* traitors. In a way, we're not even patriots. We're Christians, who believe that every human being has the right to live his life in decency and peace, outside the control of world politics. We're trying to save Britain first merely because we happen to be British. It would be the same if we were American or Russian or French. We'd start at home and work outward. Can't you understand that this is something above and beyond mere nationalism? It's an attempt to save fifty million souls from the negation of all spirituality—the struggle for power.”

“And you want me to join you?”

“No. I'd be delighted if you did, naturally, but I don't think even I can convert an Indian Army colonel in one evening. No. All I ask you to do is to be passive—to let things take their course without trying to stop them. You have found out something of our plans—how much, I don't know. You have taken some preliminary steps to combat them—of what nature, I don't know either. All I ask is that you tell us what these steps are, so that we may circumvent them, and that you then refrain from further interference. Surely, surely you can see how important this is? You *must* see it! It's the one chance of spiritual regeneration for fifty million people.”

“To be achieved,” said the colonel dryly, “by throwing them out of their jobs and making it impossible for them to get others. No, I'm afraid I don't see it.”

“A purely temporary unemployment. Once we've lost our export markets, and realize that we've lost them—”

“America will have stepped in and grabbed them. I don't blame her. We'd do the same to her in like circumstances. By the time we get going again, we'll have no customers, and Zillah will have cleaned up another few million.”

For the first time, Colin noticed, the prophet looked slightly put out. “What do you know about Zillah?” he asked sharply.

Stanley shrugged. “What the world knows. That he's a crooked financier of doubtful nationality with enormous

holdings in every major western country. I suppose he's selling out his British stocks at the moment and buying American ones. No, Sewell, you tell a very convincing yarn, but any project that's financed by Zillah has only one aim, and that's not the spiritual regeneration of fifty million people. It's hard cash."

Then, for seven consecutive minutes, the prophet treated his audience, seen and unseen, to a magnificent display of that spellbinding oratory of which he was master. His really wonderful voice ranged from the full organ chords of challenge to the hushed whisper of appeal. He was everything by turns—proud and humble, profound and childlike, mystic and man-in-the-street. Yes, he was using Zillah. Had Christ scorned to use Zaccheus? Might not an unworthy vessel be sanctified by contact with a worthy cause? And even were it not so, did it matter? If Zillah cared to work out his own damnation, might he not in doing so be the means of helping others to the light? What did a few million pounds matter anyway? The love of money was the root of all evil. Let Zillah perish if he so willed. His fall would raise others to grace. Flowery and flowing, balanced and beautiful, the stately periods rolled out. And Colin, half hypnotized by the personality that pervaded every word, had to keep tight hold on himself to remember where he was, why he was there, and the dangers that beset him.

Of one thing he was profoundly convinced. Sewell was sincere. With a colossal gift for self-deception, no doubt, he had succeeded in forgetting the physical concomitants of his spiritual scheme—the misery, poverty, sickness, and death that must inevitably accompany it. These he had clearly dismissed from his mind, leaving only the idyllic picture of a Golden Age that never was and never—more's the pity—could be.

The colonel had sat very still throughout the harangue, and Colin had wondered if it was having any effect on him. But when at last he spoke it was quite apparent that it had not.

"You put up a wonderful case, Sewell," he said, "but you can't alter the facts. You propose to damage the plants of some of our major industries—and probably kill a few of the employees while you're doing it—and that, whatever crazy motive you may have, is practical treason. I shall do nothing to abet it and anything I can to prevent it. And that's final."

The prophet looked at him half blindly for a moment, and then shrugged. "My colleagues," he said, "maintain that we should be justified in compelling you to speak. I have opposed that, for I abhor force. But I warn you—they are increasingly urgent in their demands. I may not be able to override them much longer. And—I may not want to. One stiff-necked man cannot be allowed to jeopardize so great an undertaking." He turned, and made as if to leave, but paused in the doorway as Stanley spoke. The colonel's voice was even and—Colin fumbled for the word—yes, almost compassionate.

"I'm sorry for you, Sewell," he said. "You've started this thing with what you considered the best of motives. Now you're finding that all your colleagues are in it for what they can get. And a tiny shadow of doubt has come into your mind. You weren't trying to convince *me* just now—you were trying to convince yourself. You're wondering how a worth-while cause could ever attract so many worthless people. And you're beginning to wonder if it isn't the cause itself that's at fault after all."

Sewell looked at him for a moment, and Colin, seeing that look, knew with a sudden certainty that the colonel's shaft had gone home. The expression on the gaunt face was that of a man in torment—a man who had begun to lose faith in his dearest beliefs.

For a few seconds it seemed that he was going to reply. Then his mouth shut tightly, and he swung on his heel and was gone. The key clicked in the lock and Colin emerged from the window recess.

"Well," said the colonel soberly, "what did you think of that?"

"It was fantastic. I never realized—heavens, what a

personality that man's got! He almost convinced me."

"Yes, he's certainly in the great tradition of word-spinners. If he could only think half as well as he talks, this situation would never have arisen. A more arrantly nonsensical idea I never heard."

"Yes. I suppose it is. And yet, you know—"

"Don't be fooled by oratory, Ogilvie. It's a crazy idea, and the others are merely exploiting him. They don't believe in it for one minute—they're merely out to get their blood money from Zillah. Sewell's half crazy, and I'm inclined to believe he's perfectly sincere about it. But Manling's a warped and twisted creature, you know—clever, but soured. He's been agin the government—literally—ever since they refused him a cabinet job. He left the party and stood as an Independent, and he's been out to hurt them ever since. And Doctor Partridge—nominally he's Sewell's deputy, but in fact he's the business manager of C.R. A soulless old crook who'd swindle his own mother out of her last penny. They're not in this for any high-flown altruistic motive, and I think Sewell's beginning to realize it."

"I'm sure he is. I saw his face when you taxed him with it."

"You did? I thought I'd hit him pretty hard. In fact—Look here, will you give Dexter a message from me?"

"Of course I will."

"Tell him I'm convinced that Sewell's cracking, and that if he's handled properly he'll blow the whole gaff. Alan will be coming along when the police raid this place, I take it?"

"I imagine so. In fact, I'm quite certain of it."

"Good. Well, ask him to leave Manling and the others to the police but for any sake to deal with Sewell himself; or leave him to me. He's a temperamental bird, and if he's not handled delicately he'll shut up like a clam. And we can't afford that—we've got to get every possible detail of their arrangements, and get them right away."

"You mean—this prearranged date you spoke of—you think the balloon's going up pretty soon?"

Stanley looked at him gravely. "Yes, I do think so," he said. "I'm practically certain that D-Day is next Saturday. And what's more, working in the dark as I was, the steps I've been able to take to prevent it are—to put it mildly—inadequate."

They talked for a further 10 minutes or so, and then Colin left. Sewell had locked the bedroom door, of course, but the little wire manipulator made short work of it, and as two o'clock struck somewhere downstairs Colin stepped out silently into the dark corridor.

His feet soundless on the thick carpet, he felt his way along toward the turret stair. He would go straight to Kingairloch and rouse Drexter. With any luck they should have raised a posse and got back to Tyndor by half past four. And then— He smiled in the darkness as he thought of the showdown.

The stair must be very near now, he calculated, and momentarily switched on his torch. The result was startling. Every light in the long corridor leaped to life, and he found his way barred by two large and very tough-looking men. Without a word they dived for him.

The fight was neither pretty nor polite. It was, in fact, vicious and dirty to a degree, and for its first few seconds Colin found himself hopelessly outweighed. He went down before the double charge, and felt a knee sink painfully into his groin. But that his stout badger-head sporran broke the blow, indeed, he would have been finished then and there. He wriggled sideways, bent momentarily double, and lashed out with both feet like a jackknife opening. A grunt rewarded him.

Two hands were grappling for his throat now, and his struggling legs were firmly held. He could see only one of his opponents—a cold white face glaring into his own—but the other was palpably in action lower down. One at a time, Colin decided, was his only chance. He let his legs go limp and concentrated all his strength in his arms. The collar under the white face gaped slightly. He tucked his right hand in it, jerked the head forward, and stabbed two fingers of his left into the glaring eyes.

The man screamed and rolled off, holding his face.

A sudden kick freed one leg for a moment, and as the second man leaned forward to recapture it Colin shifted his weight. The man overbalanced, Colin jumped clear, and the odds were equal. But only for a moment. Out of the corner of his eye he saw a thickset figure running up from the far end of the corridor. It was Sewell's manservant, the bruiser, and he was no negligible reinforcement. Rapid action seemed called for.

Colin seized his nearest opponent in a bear hug that almost winded him, lifted him off his feet, and then, swiftly changing his grip, swung right round to gain impetus and hurled the man straight at the approaching tough. It was the old hammer-throwing technique of the Highland Games, but this hammer weighed a hundred and eighty pounds, and landed square on the newcomer's stomach. They fell together, fast.

Colin felt rather than heard a movement on the floor behind him and back-heeled hard. The third man, crawling on hands and knees to trip him, took it in the face and again rolled clear. For the moment, Colin was unassailed.

But the two ahead of him were beginning to scramble up, and if he waited the whole thing would start again. He made a swift decision and ran forward.

He could have passed the two men, for it was a wide corridor, but he saw no point in wasting an opportunity. A leap in the air, and he crashed down with both feet on the struggling heap. Then he was over and away, with the grand staircase, he hoped, somewhere ahead.

He turned right at the end of the corridor and found himself on a broad landing. Below, the grand staircase led down to the first floor, the hall, and safety. Or did it? All its lights were ablaze, which suggested that somebody might be—yes. Somebody was. Even as he hesitated, a tall figure in a dressing gown appeared on the landing below. It was Manling, and he had an automatic in his hand. Colin turned and raced up the next flight of stairs.

Someone shouted—Manling, probably—but he had a

slight start, and when he reached the next floor he could hear no sounds of pursuit. The stair light showed him, dimly, a corridor rather like that which he had just left, but not so high. Doors lined its southern side, and he remembered that these should be the "mere bedrooms." If he could get through one of them, here might be a chance of getting away by the window. He had noticed a fair number of drainpipes on the outside walls.

The first door was locked, but the second opened on inky blackness. He listened carefully, but there was no sound of breathing. He slipped inside and closed the door.

The key was in the lock, and he turned it. Then he flicked on his torch—the lights of the room might have been seen under the door—and swung the thin beam around. The bed was empty, but its sheets were turned down, which suggested that an occupant was expected. There was a tumble of male clothes over a chair. And there were heavy blue curtains that must be screening a window. He made for them.

Even as he reached them, someone tried the door handle, and then started to knock loudly. Colin wrenched at the window catch—it was extremely stiff—and forced it open. The hammering on the door was heavier now, and someone was shouting. He pushed the window up. And as he did so, a shaft of light widened across the room. He whirled round.

A door in the side wall had opened, and framed in the doorway stood Avril Trent. With her wavy hair loose on her shoulders, in a gossamer nightdress, and with her bedroom light behind her, she made—and observably had—a striking figure. In other circumstances, Colin would have been more than interested. Now, he merely shrank back into the shadow and swore softly.

"Darling!" said Miss Trent, and again "Darling!" She had a slightly off-Roedean accent. "What's happening? Are you all right?" The knocking on the outer door grew deafening. And then Manling appeared behind the girl.

"Sorry, Miss Trent," he said, pushed her aside, and

entered. The lights went on, and Colin found himself facing the unwavering muzzle of the M.P.'s automatic.

"Got you," said Manling grimly, and stopped abruptly, for the girl had begun to scream. Her eyes wide open in terror, she was pointing at the floor, and her shrieks were bloodcurdling.

Colin moved forward involuntarily and saw, on the rug beside the bed, something his torch had missed: a crumpled heap of turquoise and purple that had once been Sewell. He was lying on his back, his face somehow more gaunt than ever, and his hands tightly clenched. There was a knife in his heart.

But it was not the sight of death that paralyzed Colin, so that he could only stare in helpless horror. It was the sight of the knife. Its short ivory hilt was a graven image of Amaterasu; and it did not need his instinctive grab at the empty sheath on his forearm to tell him that it was his.

Chapter Ten

DRAWING-ROOM DRAMA

THE ARRIVAL OF THE POLICE was almost a relief. For half an hour—ever since the M.P. had phoned for them—Colin, Manling, and the pugilistic manservant had been sitting in that very drawing-room into which the young Scot had peered so short a time before. They had been sitting in silence—Manling toying with his automatic, the manservant fixedly watching the prisoner, and Colin going round in mental circles on the problem of his knife, and how it could have made its way from his sleeve to Sewell's heart. He had found no solution when the police car drew up outside and the manservant slipped out of the room to answer the door.

Sergeant MacAulay proved to be a young man—younger than either of the constables who accompanied him—and Colin's heart rose. Youth in a sergeant argued promotion for intelligence rather than long service, and intelligence was what the police were going to need plenty of, if they were to make anything of this very unusual situation. He began to rehearse his story mentally.

"Good evening," said the sergeant, in a soft Lewis accent. "Which would be the gentleman who telephoned?"

Manling rose and slipped the gun into his dressing-gown pocket. "I am, Sergeant," he said. "My name is Manling, as I told you. I'm a Member of Parliament, and a close friend of Mr. Sewell's."

"Just so, sir, just so. And where is—er—the deceased?"

"In his bedroom. Do you wish to go there right away, or shall I tell you what's happened first?"

"Perhaps if you would be good enough to give me a general idea—"

"Certainly." He cleared his throat and glanced auto-

matically around to collect his audience. Colin half expected him to reach for a nonexistent dispatch box.

"At approximately two o'clock I was going to bed, when I heard someone moving in the room below me; the Rob Roy suite, I understand it's called. Knowing that the suite is unoccupied—" He broke off and looked at Colin, whose face indicated stark amazement. "Yes? Were you going to say something?"

Colin shut his mouth grimly. So that was the story! He began to think furiously.

After a brief pause the M.P. resumed. "Knowing, as I say, that the suite is unoccupied, I decided to investigate. I took my automatic with me and went downstairs. The Rob Roy suite is on the second floor, but when I reached that landing I thought I heard someone in the hall, so I continued on my way down. There was nobody in the hall, so I started upstairs again. And now I really did hear something—the sound of a fight. And as I reached the first floor I saw this man." He nodded toward Colin. "He appeared on the landing above me, looked down, and then ran up the next flight. I followed, and was joined by Bennett here—Mr. Sewell's manservant. Bennett told me that he had surprised a burglar, who had got away from him, and together we went up to the third floor."

So they were not going to mention the first two toughs, Colin reflected. And the Rob Roy suite was unoccupied, was it? Dimly he perceived the plan, and wondered how best to counter it.

"On the third floor," Manling continued, "are the bedrooms of Mr. Sewell and his three guests—Miss Trent, Doctor Partridge, and myself. Miss Trent and Doctor Partridge are up there now, by the way. She's rather hysterical and he's looking after her. You'll see them later. However, I digress. Bennett and I decided to rouse Sewell, so we tried his door. It was locked. We knocked on it, and called to him. There was no reply. This alarmed us, naturally, and Bennett suggested that we should try to get in through the room next door, which

connects with Sewell's. We did so." His pause was the pause of a trained orator building up to his climax. "We found poor Sewell on the floor—stabbed—and this man crouching by the window—"

It was beautifully done, Colin admitted. But there was nothing beautiful in the way in which Sergeant MacAulay was looking at him.

"I see, sir," said that officer. "Thank you. And now, if you would just take me upstairs—Dougie, you and Malcolm'll stay here and keep an eye on the pr—on this character."

"Sergeant," said Colin desperately, "this thing is very far from what it looks on the surface. I want—"

"I'd advise you to say nothing at present," said the soft voice. "You can make a statement later if you like, but I'm bound to warn you that anything you say may be taken down, and—"

"I know," said Colin. "I know all that, and I'll make a full statement in due course. But there's one thing I'm going to say before you leave this room."

Manling frowned impatiently. "Couldn't all this wait till later? It's nearly three, and—"

"Yes indeed, sir," said the sergeant, and moved toward the door.

"Sergeant!" Colin's voice rang out peremptorily, and MacAulay halted in his tracks. You cannot command men for most of your adult life without acquiring the technique, and the sergeant's reflexes knew an order when they heard one. "The Rob Roy suite may be unoccupied now, but an hour ago it *was* occupied. It was occupied by Colonel Stanley of the Home Office, and he was a prisoner in it. You've been advised that he's missing, I fancy. Well, that's where he was at two o'clock this morning. And he's still in this house somewhere, with two thick-eared thugs guarding him. I'll give you my parole not to leave this room if you'll get your men on to searching for him."

The sergeant was obviously shaken. Impressed though he was by Manling's personality and position, he was no

fool. And Colin, burglar though he was and murderer though he must be, had sounded very convincing. Frowning, MacAulay looked to the M.P. for guidance.

"This," said the latter, "is sheer lunacy. Why on earth should Sewell be keeping anyone prisoner? I assure you, Sergeant, that the Rob Roy suite is *not* in use. You can have a look at it, if you like."

"You'd do better," said Colin, "to question the servants. Not Bennett here, if that's his name, but the local ones. Janet MacClymont, for instance. She'll tell you that an elderly gentleman has been kept in the suite, under guard. She doesn't know his identity, of course, but—"

"Ah!" It was Manling who had spoken, and MacAulay turned to face him. The M.P. was chuckling. "I begin to understand, Sergeant. What a magnificent fantasy someone has built up around the poor professor! The elderly gentleman—did he occupy the Rob Roy suite last night, Bennett?"

"Yes, Mr. Manling." The valet's voice was surprisingly high-pitched.

"I thought so. The elderly gentleman, Sergeant, was Professor Longmore of Harvard University, and his two 'warders' were his secretary and his valet. The professor is an invalid, and I suppose that gave rise to this ridiculous bit of belowstairs gossip. In any event, the professor left for Glasgow at midday—a good thirteen hours before this tragedy occurred."

"On the contrary," said Colin, "he was still here at 2 a.m., and he wasn't a professor. He was Colonel Stanley, Sergeant, I—"

"Sergeant," said the M.P. wearily, "this is the most complete waste of time. Professor Longmore and his two companions left in Mr. Sewell's car at one o'clock. At least, so I was informed. I didn't arrive myself till about four, but I imagine that Bennett—" He looked inquiringly at the thickset manservant.

"Quarter to one it was, Mr. Manling," said the latter. "Just after the mist came down. They'd crossed by boat on Monday, and it upset the professor, so Mr. Sewell

suggested he should go back overland. Chalice—that's the chauffeur, Sergeant—drove them up to Fort William, to catch the train for Glasgow."

The sergeant nodded. "The two fifty-six that would be," he said. "Yes, they would just do it nicely."

Colin groaned inwardly. It all dovetailed so neatly, and Fort William, though no major city, was a sufficiently important terminus to admit of the possibility of travelers using it without being particularly noticed, especially during the tourist season. In other words, though no evidence would be forthcoming save that of Bennett and his fellow perjurer, the chauffeur, its absence would not necessarily disprove the story—at least until "Professor Longmore" was found to be nonexistent. And for all he knew, they might have an answer ready for that one too. Yes, they were clever all right. He wondered what to do next.

The elder of the two constables saved him the trouble of deciding. He had been staring at Colin's kilt with oxlike eyes completely void of expression, and now he spoke. "That is the Ogilvie tartan," he said. "I wonder would you be the Ogilvie that's staying with Mr. MacLean, Rose Cottage?"

"Yes," said Colin, "I am." And he grinned wryly at his own simplicity. What other burglar would have gone into action with his name writ large on his garments? Truly he had a lot to learn.

A look of satisfaction spread over the constable's large, weather-tanned face, and its owner turned and whispered hoarsely to the sergeant. Colin caught two phrases only—"Nervous breakdown, they call it," and, "No' just right in the heid"—and, in sudden realization, cursed Mr. MacLean's inventive genius. This had torn it properly.

"Well, Sergeant? Shall we go up?" Manling's voice held just the right blend of deference and authority.

"If you please, sir. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. Do you two keep an eye on him, like good lads. Mr. Bennett, would you come with us, please?" And the three filed out.

Alone with the two stolid constables, Colin reviewed the situation gloomily. He had contacted Stanley, certainly, and obtained the vital information from him. But from that moment onward his mission had failed hopelessly. He had been caught and identified, Stanley had been transferred to some out-of-the-way cellar or somewhere, Sewell had been murdered, and the police thought that he, Colin, had done it. They also thought that he was mad.

He had refrained, purposely, from mentioning Drexter's name to the sergeant, for he did not want to warn Manling and give him time to find a means of discrediting the baronet, or otherwise invalidating his usefulness. He wanted Drexter to burst on the party unannounced—as he would do in a couple of hours, for it was now half past three. But even more, he wanted ten minutes' talk with Drexter before anyone else got at him. Advised of the colonel's discoveries, and of his presence somewhere in the house, the baronet would know how to play his cards. But if he arrived unprepared, he would be helpless. He might fall for the "Professor Longmore" yarn—for obviously Colin could not pass on the colonel's real message in front of Manling, and without it his story would sound very weak. He might even believe that Colin *had* murdered Sewell, and was inventing the Stanley story in an attempt to fog the issue. He might believe anything, unless Colin could get to him first and convince him of the truth.

What were the chances, he wondered. Drexter would go to the police station at, or just after, five o'clock. The inspector would tell him what had happened, and they would come on to Tyndor. (Why wasn't the inspector at Tyndor already, incidentally? Surely murder was important enough to justify his personal attention? The answer must be that there was no inspector—or, rather, none within reasonable distance. It was, after all, a very remote and sparsely populated area.)

Well, anyway, Drexter would meet *some* police officer, would say his piece, hear the news, and come round to

Tyndor immediately. From then on he would be surrounded by people—Manling almost certainly among them—and there would be no chance of private talk. There might be a chance later—he could always ask to see Drexler in his cell, he supposed—but by then the colonel might, and probably would, have been removed to some other hiding place. No, if he was going to talk to the baronet in time to be of any use, he would have to catch him before he reached the house; before, if possible, he even went to the police. And that meant leaving now.

He was not yet under arrest, of course, but that was only a matter of time. Certainly he was not free to walk out of the room, let alone the building. Dougie—or it might have been Malcolm—was between him and the door, while the other “good lad” had seated himself strategically by the window. And they were both large, solid-looking men.

A bolt for either the door or the window would almost certainly be foiled. He *might* be able to knock out one of the two. He might even, with a lot of luck, knock out both. But the odds were greatly against it. And in any event, fond though he was of scrapping, Colin had all the law-abiding Briton’s distaste for obstructing the police in the execution of their duty. He would hate, he admitted to himself, to hurt either of these unoffending men. His escape—and escape he must—would have to be achieved by guile.

He pondered on ways and means. If he suggested that the room was stuffy—which it really was not—they might open the window for him, but they certainly would not allow him to open it for himself. If he pleaded a call of nature, they would undoubtedly escort him to the usual offices. If he simulated a fit, one of them would stay and guard him while the other fetched Doctor Partridge. That would reduce the odds, certainly. But he would still have to fight the one who remained.

Unless, of course, he could combine the fit with the “stuffy-room” trick. Yes, that might do it. Suppose he

grabbed his throat suddenly, staggered to his feet, and fell on the floor as near the door as possible. One of them would run upstairs for the doctor. If he then croaked a pitiful, "Air! Air! Open the window, for God's sake!" the other man just *might* fall for it. He could then jump up, race out through the hall, and get away by the front door. Maybe.

It was a pretty desperate chance, but the ornate clock on the marble mantelpiece said ten minutes to four, and he had no time to lose. He passed a hand over his forehead, wriggled his neck in his collar, and began to breathe gulpingly. They were both watching him, he saw. His gulps became deeper. In a few seconds now—The door opened, and his hopes crashed. Manling, Partridge, Bennett, and the sergeant walked in. Escape was hopeless. Sick at heart, Colin returned to normal breathing.

"What happens now, Sergeant?" Manling was asking.

"That was the superintendent at Oban I was speaking to, sir. I told him Inspector Beaton was laid up, so he's coming over himself as soon as he's got in touch with the chief constable."

"The chief constable? Is that still Major Sutherland?"

"Yes sir. Do you know him?"

"Very well indeed. And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime, sir, I'll leave a constable here, if you don't mind, and get along to the station with this Ogilvie." He turned to Colin. "I am detaining you," he said, "on suspicion of being concerned in the—"

"Sergeant! One moment!" Colin was desperate. This was worse even than he had expected. If they were going to lock him up now, he would probably miss Drexter altogether. He decided that he must play his trump card after all, Manling or no Manling. "I came here on the instructions of Sir Alan Drexter of the Home Office," he said. "It's not an ordinary burglary, I assure you."

He had certainly succeeded in halting the sergeant. "Sir Alan Drexter, is it?" said the officer.

"Ycs. You may not have heard of him, but—"

"Oh aye, I've heard of him. That wee *Kestrel* of his has been in the loch the last day or two. She's lying at Kingairloch tonight."

"She is," said Colin, thanking the powers that be for a sergeant who knew what was going on in his own area. "And I was on board her tonight. Sir Alan knew I was coming here, and indeed it was on his business that I came."

"I don't know," said Manling gently, "whether you're acquainted personally with Sir Alan, Sergeant? No? Well, I am, and you can take it from me that he is the soul of honor. I cannot conceive that he would, in any circumstances, connive at a crime like burglary. Either Ogilvie is—er—under a delusion, or else he's willfully maligning a very honest gentleman."

"I must admit," said MacAulay doubtfully, "that it doesn't sound—"

"Sir Alan Drexter," said Colin, "not only connived at this burglary, he organized it, and he brought me here in his dinghy. I suggest that you refer to him for confirmation."

It ought to have been a stunner, but as he looked at the sergeant's face, he realized that it was far from it. Hoping to drive home his advantage, he had merely lost it altogether. MacAulay, while he *might* be prepared to accept Drexter's pre-knowledge of Colin's intention, obviously could in nowise envisage a titled government official personally planning crimes and ferrying murderers to their work. It did not need Manling's meaning shrug or the doctor's significant nod to tell him that he had overplayed, and lost.

"All right," he said bitterly, "let's get along to the station." He felt tired, dispirited, and wholly disgusted with himself.

"We're going," said the sergeant briskly. "Dougie, you'll drive. Malcolm will wait here and keep an eye on things. Mr. Manling, I'll be back as soon as the superintendent arrives, and I'll bring the police surgeon with me. Miss Trent will be fit to make a statement in about

six hours, you think, Doctor?"

"About that," said Partridge. "I've given her a fairly moderate sedative."

"Just so, just so. Thank you, gentlemen. Now, Mr. Ogilvie, if you're ready— Carry on, Dougie."

Preceded by the constable, followed by the sergeant, Colin walked ignominiously out into the hall. He could feel the triumph that radiated from Manling and Partridge, and it made his dejection the more complete. What a mess he had made of everything!

Bennett appeared from somewhere and glided forward to open the front door. His face was expressionless but his eyes, as Colin briefly caught them, had a sardonic gleam. Bowing deferentially, he swung the door wide, and a thick wall of mist rolled in.

For a second, instinctively, MacAulay and the constable halted. And in that second Colin moved fast. He felt a hand grab at his arm, heard a shout and a curse, and then he was out in the dense heart of the mist, running blindly and for dear life.

Chapter Eleven

CASTLE STALKER

HE HAD TURNED LEFT as he came out of the house, and now he ran till he found himself among rocks and moss on an upward slope. That was the northern side of the bowl, and somewhere ahead—if only he could maintain direction—lay Kingairloch and *Kestrel*. He slowed to a fast walk, though even that, he knew, was literally risking life and limb.

He had no illusions as to the permanence of his liberty. Even if he were not caught before then, he must inevitably surrender after he had told Drexter his story. And indeed he had no real wish to do otherwise. His usefulness was ended until such time as the genuine murderer should be caught, for a hunted fugitive can scarcely prosecute the affairs of government. Besides, once he had passed on the colonel's message, the case should be as good as over. Drexter and Scotland Yard would know what they were up against and would proceed to tackle the matter officially. His job would be finished. He would have nothing left to do—except to explain how Sammy, the Japanese dagger, had made its way into Sewell's heart without his agency. And that, he reflected grimly, might take quite a lot of explaining.

The sound of waves breaking gently on shingle somewhere below brought him to a stop. The mist was thicker than ever and visibility was nil, so he moved cautiously to his right in a drill square "Right Close," a pace at a time. On the fifth pace his outstretched foot met no resistance, and he drew back quickly. Blazes! He must be veering very badly to the right! Another few yards and he would have been over the edge.

Rather more slowly, he advanced at what he estimated to be a forty-five-degree angle to the coast line, and continued on that tack for a couple of hundred yards before

heading north again. If indeed he *was* heading north. In this blanket of gray damp, over rough ground, it was almost impossible to keep one's bearings.

Day had broken, presumably, and the sun would be up in no long time. He prayed that it would not disperse the mist too early, for he knew that by this time every policeman in Morvern would be out looking for him. MacAulay might have sent Dougie after him—it had felt for a time as if someone were following—but he himself had undoubtedly gone straight to the phone to warn all stations. Extra men were probably being drafted into the area at that very moment. Colin began to hurry again.

As he went, he revolved once more in his mind the mystery of the dagger. It must have fallen from its sheath, presumably, during his fight with the two toughs—he knew from experience that only some such rough treatment would dislodge it—but how could anyone have picked it up, got upstairs, killed Sewell, and got away again before he himself arrived in the bedroom? Even using the turret stair, which he knew continued to the third floor, they could never have done it in the time.

The answer was, then, that they *hadn't* got away. The murderer must have been under the bed, or somewhere else in the room, while he was trying the window catch. And if so, that let Manling out. Which, as he was prepared to bet that neither Bennett nor the two other toughs could have got upstairs before him—he had left all three on the corridor floor, he remembered—narrowed the field considerably. Only the doctor could have done it.

Could the doctor have done it? Psychologically, he probably could. But was he physically able to keep the time schedule involved? Colin remembered the old man's near-collapse when he and Manling had climbed the sheep track, and decided that he wasn't. There must be something wrong with the argument somewhere. He pushed it out of his mind and concentrated on his route.

With periodic compensatory left inclines he came at

last to trees and a steep, steady downslope. This must surely be Kingairloch. He moved laterally along the slope and reached, in a few minutes, what was obviously a defined track, though whether it was the one he had followed six hours before he could not judge. Ahead of him, the lapping of water grew louder every moment.

His watch, peered at closely, said five-twenty. Had Drexter, he wondered anxiously, set out dead on time, or had he allowed an extra margin for the mist? Crossing his fingers, he stepped out onto the shingle.

For all he could see, *Kestrel* might be right opposite him, but there was no dinghy waiting at the water's edge, so presumably she was not. She might be either left or right—he had no idea whereabouts on the shore of the inlet he was—but, on the general principle that he had been veering to the right all the way, he chose left, and made his way quickly along the water's edge.

Less than a minute later a vague outline took shape before him—a dinghy drawn up and a dark figure standing by her bows. He halted. "Is that you, Drexter?" he asked softly. "Ogilvie here."

"Is it indeed?" said the dark figure, and lunged forward. But his pleasantry had cost him his prize, for at the first Highland syllable of it Colin sprang back and ran, the policeman stumbling after him. It had been a very near thing indeed.

He pulled up in the shelter of the trees, and a moment later heard his pursuer stop too. There was only the gentle lapping of the swell to be heard as each strained his ears for a hint of movement by the other.

So Drexter had not waited for him after all. There was no reason, of course, why he should, and every reason why he should not. But the police—on a hint, no doubt, from Manling—had thought it worth while to post a man in case he tried to reach the baronet. He wondered how the M.P. had justified such a change of front from his former insistence on Sir Alan's innocence. Probably by ascribing Colin's story to a delusion which its unfortunate possessor would follow up to the end. Certainly

he would never have admitted that he guessed the "delusion" to be fact.

A displaced pebble, scattering on the shingle, told him that the policeman was closing in. It also gave him an idea. Suddenly breaking cover, he ran noisily along the beach for about twenty yards, then stopped, picked up half-a-dozen pebbles, and moved quietly up to the turf border that fringed the trees. His pursuer had stopped a couple of seconds after he did, and Colin could picture him, standing silent again in the mist, his ears strained to catch the slightest sound. Well, he was going to catch one all right. Gently, Colin lobbed a pebble onto the shingle five yards ahead, and heard the crack as it landed. A few moments later he lobbed another—ten yards, this time. Then he listened.

The policeman was surprisingly light on his feet, but some faint crunches indicated that he was moving forward. Colin tossed a third pebble fifteen yards up the beach, and then a fourth.

The crunches were abreast of him now, and he held his breath. But the man continued to move steadily forward, and soon the sounds of his progress died away. Throwing a final stone well up the beach, Colin started quietly back along the turf toward the dinghy.

Drexter's absence had thrown him off his stride, and he wanted time to rearrange his ideas. He had no real plan in mind, save that he was determined to retain his liberty, if it were at all possible, until he had seen the baronet. And he was extremely unlikely to retain it in Morvern, if the mist lifted, as it might do at any time. Wherefore he was going to get out of Morvern. Beyond that, he had no program.

Finding the dinghy meant leaving the safety of the silent turf and crossing the beach, but he reckoned that his trick with the stones had probably secured him half a minute's grace; and half a minute should be enough. In the event, it proved to be only just enough, and as the little boat floated clear of the land he heard the policeman wading in after it. But a couple of punt-pole

strokes with an oar carried him into deep water, and his pursuer, he was glad to note, had sense enough not to start swimming. Colin settled on the thwart and began to row. As he did so, the policeman's whistle shrilled out. Colin put one foot on the stern seat and began to row really hard.

So long as the mist lay, the whistling was unlikely to bring him any trouble. Indeed, it helped to give him his bearings, for by keeping it on his starboard quarter he was bound to head for the mouth of the inlet and the wider waters of Loch Linnhe. And something told him that the farther he got from Morvern at the moment, the better it would be. Thought there must be other boats on the shore, he had no fear of pursuit. A hundred yards' start in this weather, and he knew he could elude the combined navies of the world.

After fifteen minutes of hard pulling he rested on his oars. The whistling had ceased long before, and now there was no sound at all save that of the little tub smacking gently against the water. The mist had grown lighter, but no thinner, with the sunrise. And the swell was rocking him more than it had done at first, so that he knew he must be well out in the loch. The tide was probably carrying him along now, but of course, without landmarks, it was impossible to judge. He could not even tell, when he rowed, if he was still heading for the Appin shore. He might have fetched a half circle, and be making for Lismore; or—uneasy thought—a whole one, and be sailing back to the shore he had just left!

There was no way of knowing in this gray, clammy, silent little world of his. He would just have to trust to luck when the mist lifted. And until then, surely only the most outrageous ill-fortune could put him in immediate danger. He bent his back and started to row again.

It was perhaps an hour later that he noticed, with sudden alarm, some yards of clear, smooth water astern of him. He paused, and looked around. Yes, the mist was certainly lifting, and rapidly at that. He wondered what

the next few minutes would bring forth. Sanctuary? Or capture?

In fact they revealed, dim and ghostly at first, a rocky little islet with a square, ruined tower on it; and Colin's spirits rose. At least he was clear of Morvern, for this was Castle Stalker, right over on the other side of the loch, just off the Appin shore. He had seen it when he was watching Tyndor—it was almost directly opposite the house—and had studied it with interest through his glasses. Now, he decided, he was going to make its acquaintance at closer quarters. He began to pull for the islet.

The mist was swirling and thinning as he scrambled ashore, and he knew that very soon it would be gone altogether. Regretfully, he shoved off the little dinghy and watched it drift away shoreward. Then he made for the old ruin.

It was only after considerable thought that he had decided to part with the boat, but obviously its presence would have given him away to any observer on the shore, and there was no way of hiding it on this bare islet. On the face of it, marooning himself on a rock was crazy; and indeed, if a search party should happen to land there, he had no chance of escape. But he hoped that the very craziness of the idea would prevent its occurring to the police—what fugitive, after all, ever deliberately cut off his line of retreat?—and that they would assume, when they found the abandoned dinghy drifting offshore, that their quarry had reached the mainland. The choice, in fact, lay between hiding in a place which *might* escape search and landing in an area every foot of which was certain to be combed within a few hours. And the Appin shore was within easy swimming distance, when the time had come to move on.

Castle Stalker, he found, had deteriorated somewhat since the days when Stewart of Appin entertained King James IV there. Four hundred years had reduced the old hunting lodge to a roofless shell, but its thick walls gave excellent all-round cover, and its mossy floor was not

uninviting. He sat down, relaxed, and thought things over.

Drexter was probably at Tyndor by now, explaining—or denying—his connection with the burglary. Either way, he would know nothing about the colonel, though Sergeant MacAulay would almost certainly tell him what Colin had said on the subject. What happened then depended on whether or not the baronet thought he, Colin, had killed Sewell. If he believed him guilty, then he would probably discount the story. Otherwise he might insist on a thorough search of the house.

Which would he do? Colin tried to put himself in Drexter's place, and decided, reluctantly, that the odds were in favor of his believing the official story. After all, he knew nothing of Colin save that he owed the gang a double grudge—for the murder of his friend and the torturing of himself—that he had already killed one member, in Sussex, and that he had apparently been more than ready to kill others. He wished, vainly, that he had not shown him that fatal knife.

Drexter, then, would accept the obvious interpretation of the facts and, knowing nothing of Colonel Stanley's discoveries, would believe that Colin was a cold-blooded murderer or, at best, a homicidal maniac. Meanwhile Manling and company would proceed unhampered with their plans for sabotaging the country's trade, and that poor devil Stanley would be tortured till he admitted that his countermeasures were actually fictitious. After which he would be killed because he would know too much.

It was a depressing summary and a black outlook. And the only person who could prevent it from becoming fact was himself—on the run for murder, and popularly supposed to be mad. More than ever he realized that he must see Drexter, alone, and explain things. If he waited till the police got hold of him, anything might happen. They might refuse to let him see anyone but a solicitor. Or Drexter, under a pardonable misapprehension, might decline to have anything to do with the man he believed

to be an irresponsible lunatic.

It was too big a risk to take. He must, somehow or other, reach Drexter and force him to listen. After that—well—Resolutely he refused to contemplate his trial for murder. Time enough to worry about that when he had done his job.

Kestrel was presumably still lying in Kingairloch, but obviously she could not be approached by day. Though the police, he hoped, were beating Appin for him and would scarcely expect him to double back again into Morvern, nevertheless any unusual traffic on Loch Linnhe was going to be pounced on immediately. His return, therefore, must wait till night.

That meant a cheerless—and, worse still, foodless—day in Castle Stalker; a short swim to Appin at dusk; the theft of a rowing boat from somewhere along the shore, and a five-mile pull across the loch, with the risk of discovery at every yard. It was a dismal prospect.

Still, there was no alternative. So, on the doubtful principle that he who sleeps, eats, he selected a moderately flat stretch of ground and lay down. In ten minutes he was asleep.

He awoke with the rain on his face and his clothes soaking. Stiff, cold, and hungry, he sat up and looked at his watch. It was twelve o'clock.

The roofless square of sky above him was gray and watery, and fine rain was driving before a moderate breeze. The castle, he reflected, might give excellent cover from view, but it gave none at all from weather. He swung his wet arms and trotted around to restore his circulation. Then he remembered his flask, which the hospitable MacLean had refilled before they parted, and gratefully swallowed a third of its contents. The remainder he would keep till after his swim.

A desire to look at something more than four crumbling walls led him on a tour of the ruin, and he found a gap in the masonry which gave him a narrow view of the mainland without exposing him in turn. Appin looked very green and very wet, he thought, and he was

glad he was not at large in it. To add pursuit to his other discomforts would be too much altogether.

He crossed to the west side of the castle and found a similar vantage point there. But now he could see no land at all. Long gray slants of rain, driving up the loch, merged sea and sky, and the Morvern hills were completely blotted out. Even Lismore was invisible.

But there were signs of life. As he watched, a small shape materialized in the grayness and became a boat. As it drew nearer, moreover, it became a boat he knew. What on earth was *Kestrel* doing out in this weather? Had that wretched dinghy drifted back on to his islet, and was Drexter leading the police to the kill?

It seemed improbable—they would almost inevitably have come in a motor launch—but the little yawl was certainly heading his way. He wondered if his luck had turned at last. Even if Drexter were *not* making for Castle Stalker, his present course would bring him within hailing distance very shortly.

But just as the thought formed he saw the little boat put about and go off on the other tack. Slowly her outline grew more blurred, her bulk smaller. And then, when she had almost disappeared, she came about again, and once more drew nearer, on a course parallel to, but well south of, that which she had first followed.

Drexter was tacking down the loch, obviously. But why? Not for pleasure, surely, in a downpour of rain and at this stage of a murder case. Clearly, he must be going somewhere. Oban, perhaps, to confer with the police there? But if so there were quicker ways of getting to Oban than by sailing into a moderate wind. A motorboat would do it in a quarter of the time; and there must be motorboats in Morvern. Why trouble to take *Kestrel*?

The answer struck him quite suddenly. Drexter had taken *Kestrel*, not because he was in no hurry to get to wherever he was going, but because he was not coming back. He had an anchorage in Loch Etive, Colin remembered, where he left the boat when he went south. And

that, presumably, was where he was now bound for.

The more he thought about it, the more likely it seemed. Sewell's death, after all, must have broken up the house party. However much it went against their plans to leave, Manling and Partridge could scarcely remain at Tyndor, any more than Avril Trent would. The well-bred guest does *not* stick around after his host has been murdered. He goes home. And it was unlikely that the police would ask them to stay, for the police had solved the mystery to their own satisfaction, and were now merely running down their suspect. No, it was quite obvious. Drexter was going back to London because the storm center was shifting back to London. Which was very sensible of Drexter, but knocked things completely on the head for himself. It might have been feasible to get from Castle Stalker to Kingairloch without being intercepted. To get to London was frankly impossible. He had plenty of money with him, it was true. But even so, the idea was out of the question.

Or was it? He tried to visualize the map as he had studied it in the train coming up. There was a railway line that ran down the Appin coast—he could actually see it from where he stood. Where did that go to? He thought hard, and decided that it was only a local line from Ballachulish to Oban. There was clearly no point in getting to Oban, headquarters of the man hunt in which he was quarry. He wanted something that would take him right out of the danger area—as far south as Glasgow, at least.

Unfortunately, he had concentrated mainly on the western side of the map, but he seemed to remember another railway line farther east—a line that ran down through the Grampians to Crianlarich and, eventually, Glasgow. That must be the line from Fort William, the route which the mythical Professor Longmore was supposed to have taken. And if it ran from Fort William—the map was coming back to him now—then it also served Mailaig. And Mailaig was a fishing port, which meant that there ought to be fast goods trains running

on the line. If he could get aboard one of these—

There would still, of course, be the change of stations at Glasgow and a thousand other difficulties. But he had a deep-rooted tendency to meet troubles only when they arose, and Glasgow was still a long way off. He closed his eyes tightly and tried to recapture that vital section of the map.

Starting at Loch Linnhe, where he now was, and moving eastward, there was first the Ballachulish railway and then a road. Then, as far as he could recall, there was rough, trackless country, pitted with hills and lochs. Beyond that was another road—the new road from Glasgow to the south. And immediately beyond that—yes, he remembered it now—ran the Fort William-Glasgow line. It must be 25 miles away, as the eagle flew. But he was no eagle, and a route that crossed Loch Etive and Ben Starav was no good to him. He thought again, striving to recall the contours of the map. Most of the area, as he remembered it, had been colored a dark and unwelcoming brown.

Was it, he wondered suddenly, worth trying? The odds against his reaching London unobserved were about a million to one. And even if he did reach London, it was always possible that Drexter had not gone there at all. And even if Drexter *was* there, and he managed to see him—what then? Ten minutes' talk, and then surrender. "Ogilvie, who gave himself up to the police last night, was in an exhausted condition. He will appear at Bow Street today." Would it not, perhaps, be more sensible to give himself up now, and save everyone a lot of trouble? The police, after all, were reasonable beings. Drexter was an intelligent man. In all probability an interview with him could easily be arranged. Why waste time and energy on a Robert Louis Stevenson cross-country chase when it wasn't really necessary?

Had Sergeant MacAulay appeared at that moment with the offer of dry clothes and a grilled steak, it is possible that Colin would have gone quietly. On the other hand, it is possible that he would not. There had

been Ogilvies with Bruce in the War of Scottish Independence. There had been Ogilvies with the Stuarts in the Civil War; in the '15; in the '45. There had been Ogilvies, for seven hundred years, on the underside of every forlorn hope that was going. Why should their twentieth-century son start following lines of least resistance? He was wet, cold, tired, hungry, and hunted. So what? He was also free, white, and twenty-one— With renewed concentration he went over every detail of the map that he could remember.

At two o'clock the rain lessened and a bleary sun came out. It was watery warmth at best, but it helped to cheer up Colin and confirm him in his resolve. Still more so did the sight, shortly afterward, of a motorboat crossing from Tyndor, with Manling and Partridge seated amidships. They passed within 50 yards of him, landed, and were met on the beach by a man in chauffeur's uniform, who took their suitcases and followed them up toward the road and out of sight. So his guess had been right. The storm center *was* shifting back to London. And, unless he could get to that distant city in time, it was going to be some storm.

What, he wondered, had they done with Colonel Stanley? Avril Trent would presumably return the way she had come, but, after the Longmore story, they could hardly let the old man and his two guards leave openly. Nor, with police watching every foot of the area, could they risk trying to smuggle him away yet awhile. The only other course was to keep him hidden in the house until, literally, the coast was clear. Or would they just kill him out of hand? Kay's guardian was a prisoner, perhaps a prospective corpse, and there was nothing at all he could do about it.

That started him thinking of Kay, and wondering how she would react to the murder. Would she believe him guilty? There was no reason why she should think otherwise. She had only known him for a few hours, after all, crowded though these hours had been; and what she had seen of him in that time was not really

calculated to prove his innate harmlessness. The world, he decided, was a pretty rotten place. He lay down and tried to sleep.

It was snatchy, restless slumber, and at nine o'clock he gave it up. The rain had returned in real earnest, he was soaked beyond redemption, and his hunger was a dull, gnawing ache. Action, and only action, he felt, would preserve his sanity. He got up and went to the door of the old castle.

Nine o'clock. Far too early, of course, to expect that even country folk would all be abed. But the rain greatly reduced visibility, and surely no casual wayfarers would be abroad on such a night. Police patrols, of course, would be stirring, but that would apply equally at midnight. No, early though it was, the mainland would probably be as safe now as it would ever be. Anyway, he was going to find out.

He slipped off jacket, shirt, kilt, stockings, and brogues, bundled them together and tied them to his head with his sporran strap. Wet though they were, they would be as well without a salt-water rinse. Then, naked and shivering, he walked delicately over the damp rock and lowered himself silently into the loch.

Both road and railway, he knew, ran close to the shore, and indeed Appin Station was but a few yards inland, opposite the castle. So he slowed up and trod water as he neared the land, peering through the dusk for any sign of life. There was none. Crossing his fingers, he swam quietly in.

Once ashore, he emptied his flask, feeling a grateful glow spread through him as the smooth spirit worked its way downward. There was no hope of drying himself, of course, so he scrambled uncomfortably back into his clothes and thanked his stars that he was not wearing trousers. Five minutes later he had reconnoitered and crossed the deserted road and the silent railway, and was striking inland over sodden, squelching fields.

His objective, the Fort William-Glasgow line, lay almost due east; but Loch Creran, Loch Etive, and Loch

Tulla intervened, not to mention the end of the Grampian range. Therefore he had decided to travel to the north, where Glen Etive, Glencoe, and the Moor of Rannoch offered relatively easier going. It would add many miles to his journey, but it seemed preferable to uncharted wandering over mountains, with an occasional swim thrown in. And in any case the railway ran north and south, so there was a decent chance of striking it somewhere farther up.

Two hours' walking did much to warm him and brought him to the bank of a fair-sized river. This must be the Creran, and its way would be his for some little distance. He set off upstream, and turned his mind once more to the mystery of Sewell's death.

The more he thought of it, the less he liked his previous theory. Even if the murderer *had* been hiding in the bedroom when he reached it, the interval between the fight and his arrival on the floor above was still far too short to be reasonable. He just could not believe that anyone—least of all Doctor Partridge—was capable of picking up the knife after the fight, streaking up the turret stair, running the length of the third-floor corridor, and getting into Sewell's room before he, Colin, arrived outside it. It simply wasn't possible. And the inevitable conclusion from that was that he must have lost the knife before the fight ever started.

When had he last checked its presence? He thought back carefully. He had shown it to Drexter aboard *Kestrel*. Had he looked at it again? No, but he had patted its hilt at the foot of the Tyndor slope, just before he began to climb up. Had he felt it again after that? Before he climbed in the window, perhaps? Or outside the Rob Roy suite? It was quite on the cards that he had, but he could not remember doing so. That meant that, in theory, he might have dropped it at any time after he landed from the dinghy. Which was not very helpful.

But Sammy was tight in the sheath, and never fell out without due cause. Had he bumped his arm any-

where, hard enough to dislodge the knife? He might have scraped it slightly against the sash of the little back window, for it had been a tight fit, but surely he would have heard a clatter if the knife had fallen in that stone-floored passage. No, it must have fallen on carpet somewhere. And certainly he had walked over plenty of that. But he could recall no bump, no slightest jolt that might have done the damage.

It all boiled down, in fact, to this. Sewell had been alive at ten minutes to two, when he left Stanley's room, and he had been dead at ten minutes past. Between these times he had been stabbed, and heaven knew who had stabbed him, or how they had obtained the dagger to do it with.

He started at the other end and considered possible murderers. What was the old formula? Motive, means, and opportunity? Well; he knew nothing about anyone's motives. The whole household might be knee-deep in motives for all he could tell. Means. The means had been Sammy, and presumably Sammy could have been picked up by anyone who passed by wherever it fell. Opportunity—

The Trent girl, obviously, had the best opportunity, for she slept in the next room. But he was inclined to think her entrance and her hysterics had been genuine. True, she was an actress. But "actress" covers a multitude of sins—and sinners. "Described as an actress." No. If Avril Trent had been acting, then she was the best actress he had ever seen.

Manling, now. He and Partridge had gone up to bed at a quarter to one—he had seen them go himself—yet at ten past two the M.P. was still fully clothed, save that he had replaced his dinner jacket with a dressing gown. Where had he been and what had he been doing for that hour and a half?

Partridge also, now he came to think of it, had been fully dressed when he appeared. So had the two toughs he had fought. And so had Bennett, the puglike valet. With a start, Colin realized that only Stanley, Sewell,

and the girl had been attired as one would expect to find them at two in the morning. The others, though the household had officially retired an hour before, were all up and about, dressed and ready for—what?

It was a new line of thought, and he wondered why it had not struck him before. Manling and Partridge, he remembered, had seemed to be united in violent argument against Sewell just before they left the drawing-room. Was there, perhaps, dissension in the ranks? Sewell on one side, the M.P. and the doctor on the other? With Bennett and the toughs secretly adhering to the latter party? The prophet had clearly meant to go to bed, till conscience or something drove him down to see the colonel. Had the others pretended to follow suit, and then met privately, with the three servants, to decide on a course of action? If that were so, then obviously the murder had been its outcome. In which case all five of them might be in it.

What had Sewell said after his tirade to the colonel: "My colleagues maintain that we should be justified in compelling you to speak, and I may not be able to override them much longer." And the colonel's message to Drexter—"Tell him I'm convinced that Sewell's cracking, and that if he's handled properly he'll blow the whole gaff." There was motive aplenty there, if the rest of the gang shared Stanley's opinion. And very possibly they did. Even though they had not heard the prophet's revealing outbursts in the Rob Roy suite, they might still suspect— He paused suddenly. Was it possible that they *had* overheard those outbursts?

The locked sitting-room next door. He had heard a noise in it. Creaking furniture, Stanley had said, and he had accepted it. What if that creaking furniture had been an eavesdropper, ear to keyhole? He would have heard the whole conversation—could have judged for himself how near Sewell was to renegation. And taken steps to prevent it.

He would have known, moreover, that Colin was in the house, and would have taken steps to deal with that

too. For the first time Colin considered the presence of the two toughs in the pitch-dark corridor. Their attack had been so swift that he had not paused to wonder how they happened to be waiting there, and afterward the death of Sewell had given him other things to think of. Now he realized that the two men must have been stationed there expressly to prevent his departure. In other words, the enemy had known he was in their midst.

How? When they found his knife, perhaps? But that would have told them nothing. It might have been dropped at any time, by anyone. When they heard him talking in the Rob Roy suite? But the listener had been there right from the start, and it was a pointless place to be unless they knew in advance that someone was visiting the colonel. A burglar alarm on the little back window, perhaps, ringing quietly or showing a light in—for the sake of argument—Bennett's room? That was the likeliest explanation, and it also explained the ease with which he had gained access to the suite. They had simply cleared the way for him, while he was creeping across the hall and up the stairs, called off the guards, put the key in the bedroom door, and let him go ahead. But why?

The answer was obvious and unflattering. They had hoped that Sucker Ogilvie would induce the colonel to talk, while they listened. And he had done so—had walked slap into their trap and done their job for them. "The steps I've been able to take against them," Stanley had said, "are, to put it mildly, inadequate." Which was exactly what they wanted to know.

Well, it meant that the old man would not be tortured, anyway, though it did not mean that he would not be quietly murdered as soon as the occasion offered. But it also meant that the gang, freed of any fear that their detailed plans were known, would go right ahead with their various projects. And that meant that the sooner he reached Drexter the better.

For a fleeting moment he considered once again giving

himself up to the police. It was now—he looked at his watch—one o'clock on Thursday morning, and D-Day was Saturday. There was no time to waste. If he went to the police now with his story, they could phone the baronet and have him in Scotland again by the afternoon—if they were prepared to phone him, and *if* he was prepared to fly north at the request of a discredited agent. But if they did *not* believe him, he would have thrown away all chance of achieving anything. There were too many “ifs” about it, Colin decided. The only safe way was to follow Drexter to London and make certain of seeing him there.

The Creran River had been growing steadily narrower as he walked, and now, he felt, the time had come to ford it and push eastward to Glen Etive. The rain was less, but the night, starless and clouded, was dungeon-dark, and only the faint glimmer of the water had guided his last couple of miles. How he would fare without it in the unknown hills between the two glens he did not know.

He waded across and took to the darkness at a cautious pace. The going was soft and marshy, but soon grew less so as he climbed higher. Now odd humps and tussocks occurred. Frequently he stumbled, and twice he fell full length. Then the slopes became steeper, and he ventured more of a hillman's stride. If he went over the edge of anything, it would be just too bad, but if the daylight found him still wandering about Appin it would be little better. He had to risk something, so he risked his neck.

It was crazy mountaineering, but instinct or luck took him through it with nothing worse than a grazed knee and a coating of mud. The rain stopped and the air grew fresher and colder. And then he was on level turf, with the sky clearing slightly and the murmur of water ahead. It proved to be a mountain burn, not a foot wide, but it was running away from him, and he knew that he had crossed the ridge and entered Glen Etive. The burn must be one of the Etive River's

thousand tributaries, and if he followed it he would come to the floor of the glen and, if he remembered the map aright, a road leading northeast to Glencoe. He lengthened his pace and started downhill. It would be good to feel a road under his feet again.

The burn twisted less than most of its kind, fortunately, and led him in good time to the gentler slopes below. Ahead, a thin line of gray in the sky heralded daybreak, and instinctively he increased his pace. He must be safe on the wild northern slopes of Glencoe before the world was stirring, for anywhere short of that was liable to be unhealthily populous. And Glencoe was still seven good miles away.

He could hear the waters of the Etive now, and knew that the road lay somewhere beside it. The soft wind that runs before dawn brought him the blended scents of a Highland morning—myrtle, and heath, and earth lately washed by rain. And with them—he stopped dead as he smelled it—came the unmistakable reek of strong tobacco.

Cautiously Colin went forward, quitting his burn and skirting a hillock whose shoulder he could make out dimly ahead. The light was increasing, slowly but surely, and he knew that anyone he saw would be equally able to see him. Then, startlingly clear, a man's voice spoke. "*Moran taing, Eachunn,*" it said.

Colin dropped to his knees and crept forward till he found himself looking over a hummock down into the bed of the valley. On the slope below him, not 20 yards away, sat two men: one, from his outline, a policeman; the other perhaps a shepherd. The latter was smoking a pipe—he could see the glow of its bowl. And between them they commanded—or would when dawn broke—an excellent view of the road for a couple of miles in each direction. While they sat there, further progress was impossible. And they showed no slightest sign of moving.

Chapter Twelve

THE GLEN OF WEeping

AT FIVE O'CLOCK the position was unchanged. The sun was up now, with every promise of a good day to follow the rain. Curlews screamed overhead, and occasionally winged across the green valley, but there was no other sign of life—no other, that is, save the watchful policeman and his companion, stolidly sitting at their observation post on the slope. Colin, lying on the heath behind his friendly hummock, cursed them silently, and wondered what he was going to do.

He could see them clearly now, and they were both powerful men. From their conversation, which was in the Gaelic, he had picked up nothing but their names. Eachunn was the constable and the other man was Peadair—Hector and Peter in English, as far as he remembered, though what use the knowledge was he could not see. Beyond them the Etive gurgled and winked on its way down to the loch, its namesake, and beside it ran the road that led up, tantalizingly, to Glencoe and the comparative safety of the wilderness. It was a bare quarter mile from where he lay, that road, but it might as well have been a hundred. While Peter and Hector remained on watch, it was impassable.

A dozen wild schemes went through his mind and were each in turn dismissed. Half of them required unprecedented luck and the other half required miracles. And all of them involved declaring his presence in the glen, which was the one thing he must avoid at all costs. Even if he could elude Hector and Peter for a while, such pinpointing would make his capture but a matter of time, and very little time at that. No. The strength—the only strength—of his position was the fact that the search was spread over a large part of Argyll. Once let them concentrate on a small area, and he, was a gone

goose.

The sound of a motorcycle broke in on his thoughts and, raising his head carefully, he saw the machine itself. It was coming down the glen, and its rider looked like—yes, he was—another policeman. He slowed down as he approached and waved to the two men on the hillside. Hector waved back.

A mobile patrol visiting outposts, obviously. They seemed to have this thing pretty well organized. It was a dejecting thought.

The motorcyclist stopped his machine, and the two watchers, rising stiffly, strolled down the slope to meet him. It was Colin's chance to retreat unheard, but for a moment he wondered if it was worth doing. Obviously the countryside was fully covered by watchers. If he avoided this pair he would almost certainly run into others. Probably the police had mobilized the whole active male population of the county, and— Even as the thought struck him, he began to crawl backward. If they *had* enlisted a lot of civilians in the search, he had just a faint, fantastic, outside chance of bluffing his way clear. But it involved the rapid interposition of considerable distance between himself and the trio at the roadside.

He was 300 feet higher up the hill when the sound of the motorcycle made him stop and look round. The cyclist was moving off southward, and Hector and Peter, carrying what looked like a Thermos flask and a large white paper parcel, were returning slowly to their vantage point. Colin crouched in the heath till a low shoulder concealed them, and then hurried on. He had no time to lose.

Ten minutes later he found what he wanted—a long fold in the ground, running southward, and offering concealment only so long as he bent double. Cautiously he looked over the top. The policeman and his companion, 500 feet below, were breakfasting comfortably; lucky devils. From where he stood they were clearly visible. But from where they sat—he hoped fervently,

for his whole plan depended on it—he would be much less easy to recognize. The fold of ground would hide his kilt and the hill behind would blur the outlines of his upper body. With luck, only his face and hands would be at all conspicuous. Therefore—always assuming that no genuine civilian searchers were near enough to interfere—there was a sporting chance of putting one over on the Law. He cupped his hands and shouted loudly.

“Hector! Peter! Help!”

The two men jumped to their feet and looked round wildly. Colin waved both arms, then shouted again. “Here—Ogilvie—quick!”

They saw him now and started up the slope. Colin dropped back out of sight and, crouching low, raced southward along the hillside for a full 100 yards. Then he stopped and showed himself again. They were toiling upward but not, he saw exultantly, with any great speed.

“Hector! Peter! This way—quick!” he shouted, waited till they had spotted him and changed direction accordingly, and then dropped down and ran, as he had never run before, back on his tracks.

A spur half a mile away was his objective. Once round that and he would be safe—from Hector and Peter at least. They, failing to find the “colleague” who had hailed them, would presumably cast southward, while he continued on his way north. Unless they saw him before he got round the spur, of course. His legs aching, his mouth dry, and his heart thumping, he ran on.

Luckily he had always been pretty good at running across country, and he had lived hard enough, these last ten years, to be in first-class condition. But an eighteen-mile walk on an empty stomach is poor training for speed, and it was speed rather than stamina that he wanted now. Placing his feet by instinct, urging himself forward by sheer will power, he kept on till he saw the view far ahead change, the river curve in a loop that had been out of sight before. He was round the spur. He dropped to the ground and wondered if he

would ever breathe normally again.

This was no time to relax, however, and in a couple of minutes he forced himself to rise and carry on. He dare not use the road, of course—it twisted invitingly below him—but he could parallel it here on the heights, and go to ground if he saw anyone on it. It was long odds that there would be other searchers around, though apparently there had been none within earshot of his little comedy.

He wondered why they were wasting man power by sending their men out in pairs, when they could cover twice the ground by using them singly; then laughed as the reason struck him. They were looking for a dangerous murderer, of course, and no sane man wants to do that single-handed. He felt rather flattered.

The sound of the motorcycle dropped him prone on the ground, and he saw it race dangerously up the road. Only unprofessional recklessness or considerable urgency could warrant such speed. He wondered if the constable had spoken again to Hector and was going for reinforcements. He smiled grimly and tramped on.

Ahead of him now the huge bulk of Buachaille Etive heaved up heavenward, and, behind it, peak upon scowling peak, that could only be the mountains of Glencoe. The valley was narrowing, and he had a strong suspicion that hereabouts, if anywhere, he could look for another patrol.

In a few minutes he saw it; and it was a full-blown command post. The road up Glen Etive tee'd into the Glencoe road—a depressingly modern thoroughfare—and where they met stood a police car. His friend the cyclist was there, talking to what might well be an inspector and a sergeant; but, even as he watched, a second motor bike came roaring up from the west and, after a brief conversation, the inspector and the sergeant entered the car, and the three vehicles moved off in convoy down Glen Etive and out of sight.

It was a stroke of unbelievable luck, and Colin lost no time in cashing in on it. Skirting the steep side of

Buachaille Etive and wading through the narrow river, he dropped down to the side of the broad road that ran beyond. Later in the day, he knew, that road would be thronged with traffic. But for this golden moment his luck was holding, and it was deserted. He glanced quickly both ways, then darted across. Five minutes later, with no sound to suggest that he had been seen, he was lying in the shelter of a deep, stony gully that cleft the weather-worn side of the great glen.

Glencoe is a magic name, to stir the blood of Highlanders and make even the south think twice. Wild, desolate, beautiful, it saw, in 1692, one of the dirtiest mass murders of recent centuries. Macdonalds lived there, and fell foul of their new king—a Dutch gentleman who sat on the English throne. A hundred and twenty soldiers of the Clan Campbell were sent to the glen, where, after they had enjoyed twelve days of Macdonald hospitality, they rose up by night and slew their hosts—man, woman, and child—and drove the fugitive survivors to die among the snow-bound hills.

In the Gaelic tongue, says Lord Macauley in his "History of England," Glencoe signifies the Glen of Weeping; and in truth that pass is the most dreary and melancholy of all the Scottish passes—the very Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Macauley, however, was a Whig, like the Campbells. And Andrew Lang, who was not, thought otherwise. *One of the most beautiful valleys in the beautiful West Highlands, he called it; and added, Macauley gave the place a bad name. I presume he saw it on a wet day.*

Both views, Colin reflected, as he worked up the gully toward the frowning heights above, had something to be said for them. Certainly Glencoe had all the rugged grandeur that the most fervent scenery-hound could ask. But to anyone on the run—as most of its inhabitants had been at one time or another, and as he was now—Macauley's description must seem pertinent and apt.

He reached a point where the convolutions of the rocky crags shut him off completely from sight of the

road and any other sign of civilization, and stopped to consider his position. He was now—if his reckoning was right—some eight or ten miles west of his objective. The Glencoe road ran more or less east till it reached the middle of the desolate Moor of Rannoch, when it turned due south and followed the route of the railway line. At several points, as he remembered the map, the two marched side by side, and the chances were that they were never very far apart. Therefore, if he followed the road—keeping well clear of it, of course—he should eventually reach the railway. Tightening his belt—for his hunger was now becoming desperate—he set off eastward over the rough, barren hillside.

It was the barking of a dog that halted him. There was no living thing in sight, but from somewhere close at hand that menacing sound had broken forth. Could they be using bloodhounds, he wondered, and listened again. No. This was no baying; but it was the deep bark of a fair-sized beast, and he knew that police dogs in these days were of every fighting breed. Quickly he pushed on, but the barking grew louder. And then, as he reached the lip of a rocky little corrie, he saw the dog itself.

She was a large, white, bull-terrier bitch, with a black, diamond-shaped eye patch that made her look like a film negative of Chirgwin. And her tail was wagging furiously. As she saw Colin she barked again, bounded forward, and butted him on the knee; whereafter she sat back on her haunches, head tilted, tongue lolling, and awaited praise. Colin sighed.

"Look, old lady," he said, scratching the roots of the white ears, "I don't know what you're doing in them thar hills, but you scared me stiff. And even now I wish you'd go away. You may not be a police dog—or a police-woman dog, should I say?—but you're a darned sight too noisy for my peace of mind. So go home, will you?"

On the word, the dog turned and trotted away; but only for a few yards. Then she picked up a small piece of rock, brought it back, laid it at Colin's feet, and

barked loudly.

"Listen, lass," said Colin, "in ordinary circumstances I'd like nothing better than to throw stones for you, but at the moment—"

He broke off short, for a woman's voice, clear and close, had rung out. "Susie!" she called. "Sus—ey! Where are you?"

The bull terrier cocked an ear, but made no move to answer. Colin swore gently. In half a minute this woman would arrive, and his whole scheme would be ruined. He wondered if there was a chance. If he could get down into that corrie, and she found her dog on the top, perhaps she might not look over the edge. It was a forlorn hope, but—

"Sus—ey!" The voice was nearer now. "You bad dog! Come here!" Colin could hear her footsteps, scrambling over the scree. In a matter of seconds she would see him. Mentally he selected a vaulting handhold on the rim of the little corrie and leaped for it. Simultaneously, Susie leaped too.

They crashed together, he missed his grip, and then he was rolling over and over down the slope. At the bottom, breathless, he sat up. Susie was sitting a yard away, a stone in her mouth; and as he looked at her she laid it beside him and barked twice.

"Susie!" said the voice. "Why didn't you— Oh!" Colin looked up. Gazing down at him was a small woman of thirty-five or so, with raven-black hair and an attractive, rather elfin face. She was hatless and wore hound's-tooth check tweeds. He scrambled to his feet, and fell again with a groan as a sharp pain went up his leg. He had twisted his ankle.

"Are you hurt?" asked the newcomer, and he realized from her accent that she was American.

"Just my ankle," he said. "It's nothing, really. It'll wear off."

"That's my dog's fault. I saw her bump into you."

"She couldn't help it. She was only being friendly."

"Yes," said the woman slowly, "I see that. It's funny.

She doesn't like men normally. I never before knew her—" She paused, and seemed to snap out of something. "I'm terribly sorry about your ankle. Let me look at it." Daintily she stepped down the rough slope toward him, a neat and perfectly groomed little figure. Susie went a yard or two to meet her, then hurried back and sat beside Colin, pressing herself against his arm. Her owner looked at her in surprise, then knelt and ran slim, well-manicured fingers over the ankle.

"It's not swelling any," she announced. "You probably wrenched it—which is painful, but not crippling. I'm terribly sorry."

"Please forget it. It was my own fault for larking about. I'll just rest it for a couple of hours, and by that time—"

"But you can't afford a couple of hours," said the woman, and sat back on her heels. "Can you?" Her deep brown eyes looked straight into his.

There was a curious tightness in Colin's throat as he replied. "Why ever not?" he asked with elaborate casualness.

"Because they'll find you. The police."

For a moment he debated the advisability of lying, but decided that it was hopeless. "Yes," he said, "they probably will. How did you know?"

"That you were Colin Ogilvie? My dear man, I listen to the radio. I've heard your description five times in twenty-four hours. I don't suppose there's anyone in Scotland who wouldn't recognize you at fifty yards."

"I don't suppose there is," said Colin bitterly. "Well?"

She was silent for a moment, studying him. Then, "They described you as dangerous, and liable to resist arrest," she said. "Are you?"

Colin grinned wryly. "Do I look it?" he asked.

"You look terrible—muddy and unshaven and tough. Even with clean clothes and a facial you'd probably still look tough, but—dangerous?—No. At least, not the way *they* mean. *Did* you kill that man?"

"No," said Colin conversationally, "I didn't. Does it

make any difference?"

"To me," she said, "it does. Susie and I don't care for murderers much." The dog wagged her tail as her name was mentioned, then turned her head and licked Colin's chin. Her owner shrugged. "See what I mean? Do you think I'm crazy?"

"I'm beginning," said Colin, "to hope that you are." The little American laughed, showing twin rows of small, perfect teeth.

"Are you religious?" she asked.

"Not inordinately."

"Maybe I'm not either. But I certainly am superstitious, and— Well. I've been over in England a couple of months—it's mainly a business trip—but this is my first visit to Scotland."

"It is?" Colin felt that the conversation was inconsequent, to say the least of it, but he had no desire to bring it back to the point. Crazy or not, this woman seemed to be tending toward friendliness, and he would be the last person to interfere with that.

"Yes. My husband spent a furlough here—in Glencoe—in 1944. He wrote and told me what a wonderful place it was, and said we must come here together after the war. It was the last furlough he had. He was shot down over France a week later." Colin was silent. He could think of nothing to say. "So I promised myself," she went on, "that one day I'd come here and see the place where Bill was so happy. Can you understand?"

"Yes. I can."

"So really it was Bill who sent me here. And then I meet you, and you look rather like Bill—or I think you would if you had a wash—and then my dog falls for you as she's never done for a man in all the time I've had her, and—and—well—if I were religious, I'd say it was a Sign."

"You mean you're going to let me go?"

She stood up suddenly, and her voice became brisk and businesslike. "I mean a whole lot more than that," she said. "I mean I'm going to *help* you go. Maybe I'm

nuts, and maybe I'll end my Scottish visit in a Scottish jail, but this is one case where Claire Veness plays her hunches against the bank." She glanced at her watch. "It's a quarter of eight," she said. "You stay right here. I'll be back by ten o'clock."

"Where are you going?"

"The Kingshouse Hotel. That's where I'm living. It's a couple of miles from here, on the Old Road. Susie and I are going to have some breakfast, and then we're going to get this thing organized." She smiled suddenly, a lighthearted smile that made her look years younger. "You know something?" she said. "I used to love Scottish history when I was at high school. There was always somebody taking to the hills to shake somebody else. I wonder if Bonnie Prince Charlie managed to shave regularly?"

A moment later she was gone, Susie—after a reluctant backward glance—trotting at her heels.

Was her promise genuine? Colin wondered. At the time he had thought it was. But now, alone again, he found doubts crowding in on him. Why on earth should she have decided to become an ally, on the strength of five minutes' conversation with a most unprepossessing stranger? These things just didn't happen. People didn't go out of their way to break the law in foreign if friendly countries merely because their dogs took a fancy to some stray fugitive from a murder rap.

But if the offer of help was *not* sincere, why trouble to make it? Answer: because she was alone, in a desolate spot, with a desperate criminal four times her size, and thought her only chance of escaping Sewell's fate was to use guile. Ordinarily, no doubt, she regarded the bull terrier as sufficient bodyguard. But in this case Susie's reactions could not be relied on. The dog might have defended her mistress, or she might have preserved a worried neutrality, for she had obviously taken to Colin. Therefore Mrs. Veness had decided to bluff her way out, had invented the sentimental idea that she was the Instrument of Fate, sent to succor the innocent, and was

now rushing madly to find a policeman, which ought not to be difficult on this particular morning.

The thought depressed him greatly, not only because it renewed the imminence of his danger, but also because he had rather liked the little American. She was the *soignée*, self-possessed type that always appealed to him, and there had seemed to be honesty and a sort of camaraderie in her brown eyes. Still, you could hardly blame her for using any and every trick in her repertoire to escape from what she must have thought a very perilous situation.

He climbed to his feet and gingerly tried his weight on the game leg. It hurt like the devil. But, hurt or no hurt, he had to get as far away as possible from that corrie before Claire Veness led the police to it. He gritted his teeth and hobbled on.

Progress was slow and painful, but in twenty minutes he had covered a fair distance. He was rounding a bare rock pinnacle, and wondering whether to keep to the heights or risk a descent to the lower slopes where he would be least expected, when the sound of a distant airplane froze him where he stood. An airplane was no rarity these days, even in the wild Highlands, but this one had a characteristic and unmistakable engine note that boded trouble. It was an Auster, he knew, for he had seen and heard them a thousand times before. Small, slow, and highly maneuverable, the gunners used them as flying observation posts, and he remembered how they had seemed almost to hover, a few hundred feet above ground, while the officer within radioed back a round-by-round commentary on his battery's fire.

Well, it was unlikely that the Royal Artillery had been called out against him, but it was nonetheless certain that the Auster—in radio touch with a police car, no doubt—was searching the bens and glens as no ground patrol could ever do. He dropped flat, face downward, in the shadow of the rock, and hoped that his drab and muddy clothing would blend with the browns and greens of the ground.

For over an hour he lay there, the threatening engine note never quite out of range for more than two or three minutes. Then it died away to the south, and five silent minutes passed; another five; fifteen; and he rose, cramped and cautiously, to his hands and knees.

The sun had shortened the shadow of the rock considerably and swung it round till his feet were in the clear. He must find better shelter from air view before that fellow came back. A cave, perhaps—there must be dozens in this wilderness of scree and precipice. He limped on slowly, ears strained for the first sound of a returning aircraft.

He found a place at last—a shallow recess in the cliff wall, rather than a cave, but deep enough to screen him completely when he sat at the back of it. He bent his head, went in, and flopped on the ground. All his stored-up weariness seemed to have hit him at one blow, and he slumped back against the wall in exhausted relaxation. It was thus, half an hour later, that Susie found him.

She bounded into the cave and licked his cheek, but, sensing his mood and his condition, did not bark. Instead she lay down beside him, placed her head on his knee, and gazed up soulfully at his face. Colin looked at her hopelessly. "Damn you, old lady," he said gently, "I'd forgotten that loving old nose of yours. So you've smelled me out, have you? Ah, well, it was worth trying. Bring in the escort."

"What ho, within there!" said a clear, charming voice. "Anybody home?" And Claire Veness appeared in the entrance. She was carrying a large lunch basket, and his straining ears could hear no sound of following feet. So she *had* been sincere after all! He apologized mentally for his suspicions.

"Hulo," he said inanely. "How did you find me?"

"Followed Susie. I'm glad you got out of that hollow. When I saw the little airplane going back and forth, I got so worried in case he'd seen you. But seems you were smarter than I thought. Would you like some breakfast?"

As she spoke she was opening the basket, and now she produced a napkin, spread it on the ground, and began dealing things onto it with the air of a conjurer hauling the improbable out of a hat. Fascinated, Colin watched her. There were hard-boiled eggs—half a dozen of them—stacks of sandwiches, both roll and bread, oranges, cake, three slabs of chocolate, bananas, cold sausages, potato crisps, and a quart Thermos flask. Last—and she produced it with a smile of pardonable pride—came a half bottle of whisky.

"There!" she said triumphantly. "How will you start? The coffee's good—I made it myself."

"For heaven's sake!" said Colin. "Where did you find this—this manna in this wilderness?"

"Kingshouse Hotel. I had them make up a basket for me."

"But—but—it's just marvelous of you, and I'm terribly grateful, but—don't you see—it gives us away completely."

"How?"

"They'll know you're feeding somebody, and from that to guessing who you're feeding—" He paused as he saw the amused expression on her face.

"Mr. Ogilvie!" she said reproachfully. "Do you really think I'm that dumb? 'Please may I have a lunch basket, Mary, I'm trying to get Ogilvie over the state line.' Of course they know I'm feeding somebody. They know I'm feeding two girl friends. I'm driving to meet them at their hotel in Fort William and we're all going up Glen Nevis for a picnic."

"Sorry. I underestimated you. Did you say you were driving? You mean you've got a car?"

"A Merlin V-eight sedan. I rented it in Glasgow. You'll see it in good time. Right now it's down there by the roadside, waiting for me to get back from exercising Susie, if anybody asks. And I'm not going back till I've heard the inside story on this murder of yours, and I don't listen to that till you've eaten, so—get going."

Colin got going; and never in his life had food tasted

better. He bit, munched, savored, and drank in comparative silence, and as he did so he studied his companion. Her black hair, he saw, was dressed to the last strand in an artlessly natural style that must take hours to achieve. Her tweeds were tailored with that costly simplicity that is so often described and so rarely met. Her legs, tucked neatly under her, showed a glimpse of expensive stockings, and her little brogues struck the perfect balance between fashion and service. Save for a large square emerald and a plain platinum wedding ring, her slender hands were bare.

She sat without speaking for a time, then suddenly turned to him. "Oh," she said. "Flash! Colin Ogilvie, named in Sewell murder case, was reported seen in Glen Etive Thursday."

"Where did you hear that?"

"At the hotel. It was a mistake, though. Somebody bobbed up suddenly and shouted to two of the searchers that he'd seen you. They joined the chase, and put in a three-alarm call for reinforcements, but it all blew over. Seems it was a kind of a half-witted fellow who was just playing a joke on them."

"They think that?"

"They know it. He led them all around Scotland, but they finally caught up with him. He denied it was him, of course, but it seems he's been doing that sort of thing from 'way back."

"Good life! What will they do to the poor beggar?"

"Nothing. Mary—that's the girl at the hotel—Mary says he's a poor sort of creature that's not responsible for his actions. But it certainly gave the cops one sweet little thrill while it lasted. They thought they had you."

"They jolly nearly had," said Colin, and told her the truth of the incident. She looked at him and nodded.

"My, my!" she said. "Are you lucky! Well, now it's turned out it wasn't you, I gather they figure you probably got away to the south."

"Intelligent, but premature," said Colin. "They're not withdrawing the patrols, are they?"

"I don't think so. That little airplane didn't look as if they were, did it? But you're talking too much. Don't say another word till you've finished."

Colin obeyed and, in due course, sat back and sighed. "That," he said, "was the best meal I ever ate, and I thank you from the bottom of my refortified heart. And now I'll tell you all about the Tyndor murder—as far as I know it."

And tell her he did, omitting only those details which he considered irrelevant or beyond his authority to reveal. She heard him in silence, but her eyes showed how keenly she was following the tale. At its end she looked at him in open admiration.

"Either you're the unholiest liar I ever met—and the smoothest," she said, "or else little Claire has gotten herself a bit in the crime movie of the year, only it's not a movie. Well— Oh, tell me it's true! I just couldn't bear for it not to be."

"It's true all right," said Colin.

"Yes. Yes, somehow I know it is. And if you don't make London, and see this Drexter man, Old England gets knocked for a loop?"

"That's about the strength of it."

"H'm. Never let it be said that Brian O'Connell's grand-daughter stepped out of her way to help Old England. But still less be it said that she passed up the chance to cock a snook at the police. The blood of my ancestors, Mr. Ogilvie, is not yet thinned beyond redemption."

"Your ancestors, I presume, were the kings of Ireland?"

"None other. Say, how many of these guys were there anyway? They certainly got around, for they anceded every Irishman I ever met— What was I saying?"

"You were preparing to cock a snook at the police, even if it did mean helping England."

She flung back her head and laughed. "For a woman who's probably on her way to the pen," she said, "I feel remarkably cheerful. Mr. Ogilvie, you're going to stay here under cover till I get back. And then we're going

to Glasgow together, and put you on a train for London."

"Where are you going? Now, I mean."

"Fort William. If you're to get more than a mile from here without being caught, you'll need some clothes. That kilt's not only dirty, it's conspicuous; and it'll be a whole lot more so south of Glasgow. So I'm going to Fort William and find you something you can wear without every kid in town pointing at you."

"Won't they think it's funny—your buying clothes for a man?"

"Not the way I'm going to handle it. They'll think it's tragic. I'm going to confide in them—tell 'em I just can't trust my husband to pick himself a necktie, far less a suit. They're sure to have read somewhere that Americans reverence their women, so they'll just feel sorry for the big dope and thank their stars they are not as other men are. The Celtic Pharisees."

Colin gave her his measurements and, after some argument, money for the clothes. Mrs. Veness wanted to finance the whole project, but at length agreed that maybe there *were* limits. Then, leaving him the basket—there was a good meal remaining in it—she departed with her dog.

The hours passed very slowly. At eleven the Auster returned, and he heard its drone wax and wane till nearly twelve. They might or might not believe that he had escaped to the south, he reflected, but they were certainly taking no chances. The sky clouded over—he could see the warmth die out of the hills below him—and a slight wind came up that whistled uncomfortably round his lair. He opened the Thermos again, found the coffee rather cool, and laced a cupful of it with whisky. It tasted excellent.

At half past one the Auster came back once more, and he fought down a childish urge to go out and look at it. It left again at half past two, and he decided to have lunch.

As he ate, he wondered what precisely he was going to

do when he reached London. It was all very well to say, as he had been saying, "get to London and see Drexter." But London was a very large place, and Drexter might take quite a lot of contacting. Obviously he could not call openly at the Home Office, and even to arrive at the front door of the Lowndes Square house was far too risky. He could always phone, of course, but there was no guarantee that the baronet would not go straight to the police. What he wanted was a setup where Drexter would be unable to do anything until he had heard the whole story and been convinced of its truth, after which he would himself go to the police. But how he was to achieve such a setup he could not see. He wondered, suddenly, if Kay would help.

In Castle Stalker, cold, wet, hungry, and miserable, he had been quite convinced that the girl must think him guilty. Now, however, with two large meals under his belt, he was inclined to be more optimistic. Claire Veness believed in him, after all. Why shouldn't Kay? If that shrewd little American widow—and he was certain that she was shrewd, for all her quaintness—could penetrate layers of mud and a three-day stubble and see the honesty of the man beneath, then surely it was at least even that Kay could do the same? Particularly as the mud and stubble would, he hoped, have disappeared before she saw him.

Yes, Kay was the answer. Even if she didn't believe him, she was less likely to hand him over to the police than a man would be, while if she did accept his explanation she was the ideal liaison with Drexter. And frankly, he could think of no other. He decided to get in touch with her the moment he reached London—if he ever did.

At four o'clock Susie lolloped into the cave, closely followed by her mistress. Colin welcomed both, and looked inquiringly at the suitcase which the latter was carrying.

"Your trousseau, honey," said Mrs. Veness, and sat down. "I'm afraid it hasn't got just that West End cut,

but it's the best I could do. I suppose the far-famed English tailoring doesn't operate north of the Highland line!"

Colin opened the case—it was a belabeled rawhide with the initials *C.J.V.* on it—and extracted, first, a voluminous fawn raincoat, and then a rather old-fashioned suit of pepper-and-salt tweed. "This," he said, "will be just dinky."

"I got suspenders too—I mean braces—in case those pants aren't full-fashioned. There's a kind of a shirt, too, but it pulls on over your head. And a tie. You'll like the tie. It's got *chic*. But no underwear. I didn't care to buy too much, in case they wondered why I wanted a complete outfit."

"You've done miracles," said Colin. "And what's this in the Thermos? Tea?"

"Hot water. You'll find a razor and some cream in the bag. I thought you might like a shave."

Colin looked at her, and sighed. "All this and heaven too," he said. "I'm dying for a shave."

"Go to it," said the lady, and handed him her compact. "There's a mirror inside that, though you'll probably have to look at your face by sections— Oh, and please don't shave your upper lip."

"Why not?"

"You'll find out. These clothes are only the start of what I'm going to do with you."

"Right oh," said Colin cheerfully, peeled off his jacket and shirt, and proceeded to the luxury of his first shave for three days.

"I'm sorry I was so late getting back," said Mrs. Veness, "but I came around the long way, by Kinlochleven. Going north I used the ferry at Ballachulish—it cuts off twelve miles—but there was a police guard on it, searching all the cars, so I figured the less they saw of me the better."

"So they're still watching all strategic points?"

"They certainly are. I asked the sergeant at the ferry what it was all about, and he told me they were looking

for you. Thought you might have hidden yourself in a truck or an automobile unbeknown to the owner, so they were just making sure. I like your police—they're courteous."

"They're 'also a darned nuisance," said Colin, and sluiced the residue of the hot water over his face and hands. "Why can't they go home? Gosh, do I feel better!"

"Gosh do you *look* better! You're almost handsome; in a rugged sort of way. And now, hustle yourself into the new ensemble. I'll modestly avert my eyes, though I always wanted to know if it's true what they say about kilts. I never knew a Scotsman that well—well enough to ask, I mean."

"The rumors," said Colin, "are not without foundation. The kilt, however is—entirely." Very hurriedly his companion turned away and gazed firmly out of doors.

The suit fitted not too badly, he found, though he was grateful for the braces, for the waistband of the trousers was generous to a fault. He bundled his discarded garments into the suitcase and closed it. "All clear," he said. "What's the next move?"

Mrs. Veness turned and looked at him in appraisal. "The perfect rube," she said. "Still and all, it's not as bad as I expected. In fact, it's not bad at all. It's not *you*, not one little bit—and that's exactly what we want. The next move? If you'll just lay your head on my lap, I'll show you." She was delving in her handbag.

"Lay my head on your lap?" Colin was slightly startled.

"Unless you can think of a better way. I can't. Ah!" She produced a small bottle, tastefully labeled with the single word *Venessine*, and a slim leather case from which she extracted a tiny brush. "You can thank your stars, my lad, that these raven tresses of mine have reached the age when they require a little reravening above the ears every once in a while. Otherwise I wouldn't have had any hair dye around, and I'd have been scared stiff to buy any in case I roused suspicion. Now, if you'll just squat there and lean back— That's it."

Colin felt the brush touching his hair with short, quick strokes. It was really rather a pleasant sensation. Her left hand moved his head gently as required, and the touch of her fingers was something more than pleasant. It was professional. He remembered the name on the little bottle. "Are you by any chance," he asked, "a—er—'beautician' is the word, isn't it?"

"Beautician," said Mrs. Veness, "is certainly *a* word: on Broadway, for instance. My place is on East Sixty-first Street. I'm a consultant."

"Pity," said Colin. "You'd have made a swell beautician." She chuckled, and moved his head slightly.

In an incredibly short space of time she pushed the nape of his neck, and he sat up. "And now," she said, "for that upper lip. Squat facing me." He obeyed, and she went to work delicately on the short moustache he had left unshaven. "You've got a pretty stiff growth," she said. "With your fair hair, of course, it doesn't show up, but this color, it's going to look quite respectable— You know, this would cost you fifty dollars at home: though of course you'd get a shampoo on the side— There!"

She sat back, tilted her head, and looked at him. "Not bad, Claire, not bad," she said. "And now the master stroke." She dived into her bag again and drew out a pair of dark tortoise-shell glasses. "These are polarized and very slightly tinted. They'll alter your youthful contours and tone down those bonnie blue eyes. Put 'em on."

Colin drew on the glasses and found the world go slightly darker, but not out of focus. He took the compact again, looked at himself in the mirror, and gasped. It was the face of a perfect stranger: a black-haired one.

"By hokey!" he said. "You're a magician. Claire—I can't call you Mrs. Veness after this—you've halved, you've quartered the odds against me. Like this, I've got a darned good chance of getting through. I—I could kiss you."

"You'd better let the mustache dry on first," said Claire hastily. "Else we'll both have one, and even a cop might

think that a little suspicious."

They drank the whisky while the dye was drying, and chatted amicably. Susie snored gently at their feet. The change from his state of twelve hours before was so complete that Colin laughed, and Claire looked at him inquiringly.

"Five o'clock in the morning," he said, "face downward on a hillside, looking at two immovable watchers. Five o'clock in the afternoon, sipping an *apéritif* in delightful company, with a new suit, a new head of hair, and a new heart. It just struck me as funny."

"Maybe. Maybe not. I won't do much laughing till I see that train pull out of Glasgow with you safe aboard it. We've still got a long way to go, Colin."

"I know it."

"And that reminds me. You'd better be my husband—Chester J. Veness, to match the initials on the bag. We're doing Scotland, but you've had a rush call to London for a conference with the European office of your corporation. I'm waiting here till you rejoin me. D'you think you can manage to talk like an American if we're stopped any place?"

"Sure t'ing, kid," said Colin confidently. "De bulls ain't gonna t'ink dere's nuttin' phony in dis setup. No, sirrec. How'm Ah doin', bāby?"

"For heaven's sake! What are you trying to say?"

"How's that again? Say lissen, sister, I'm one hundred per cent Amurrican, an' no Scatch mug's gonna push *me* around, see? I'd have you know that I'm a cirrizen of the U-nited States, an' I don't mean mebbe. I got rights." He tailed off, for Claire had begun to laugh—heartily and helplessly.

"Oh, dear!" she said at last. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! Colin, do we really sound like that to you?"

"Well, I haven't given it a lot of thought, actually, but I seem to remember one or two films—"

"I'll say you do. Would you like to try remembering one that wasn't about the Bowery and model yourself on that? Or, better still, try to imitate me? I know I've

been corrupted by two months in London, but I still sound basically American. Come on, you've got to put in a lot of practice before I let you loose on the roads."

And practice they did, discussing their mythical tour in detail, until Colin gradually acquired an accent which, while it would doubtless have been regarded as charmingly Scottish in America, might conceivably be thought American in Scotland. At half past five Claire looked at her watch, and began to get up.

"That's all we've got time for, I'm afraid," she said.

"Leave the talking to me as much as possible, and if you do have to say anything, try to remember that we have *not* been here for 'a fortnight.' We've been here two weeks. Also you *don't* have to say, 'I guess' every other sentence."

"Okay, chief," said Colin, and caught her eye. "Sorry, Claire. I mean, 'Sure, honey.'" She shook her head in misgiving, and they went out of the cave.

Once out on the hillside again, Colin found the light-hearted mood of the past hour drop from him completely. He was a hunted man again and, though his changed appearance and his acquisition of a brand-new wife, dog, car, and nationality gave him better prospects of success, he was still hundreds of dangerous miles from his goal. And not the least dangerous was the one which separated them from the road. In the car they might, and probably would, look a normal, law-abiding couple. But carrying a suitcase down the rocky steep of Glencoe they were liable to cause comment—if anyone saw them.

Claire went ahead carrying the lunch basket while Colin, his ankle almost recovered after its long rest, brought up the rear and the suitcase. Susie ran a shuttle service between them.

A final reconnaissance round the shoulder of a rock showed them the V-eight parked by the roadside a hundred yards away. It also showed them two charabancs coming up the glen. Waiting till these had passed, they made a dash for the car, and tumbled into it only just before a big family touring car appeared round the bend

ahead. It drove past, and Colin rapidly transferred Susie, the suitcase, and the lunch basket to the rear seat, while Claire ran the engine. A moment later they drove off.

"You'll find a road map in that pocket, Chester," said Claire, "if you'd care to navigate. I drove up via Stirling and Callander, I remember, but I'm not dead sure of the route."

"There's a shorter one," said Colin, studying the map, "through Glen Falloch and down Loch Lomond side. I'll direct as required." He noted her easy use of "Chester" and tried hard to think himself into the role of the fictitious Mr. Veness. Watching her clean-cut profile and the classically perfect little ear that her hair style revealed, he reflected that it wouldn't be a very difficult role to sustain in any circumstances.

They drove southeast to Rannoch Moor and climbed steadily till, rounding the shoulder of a mountain, the road turned south and descended to pass between two small lochs. Uphill again for a time, then they were dropping sharply to skirt another stretch of water—Loch Tulla, he saw by the map. He looked ahead on the left, and saw a railway track curving in to follow the line of the road. That would be the one he had been making for—the Forst William-Glasgow line. He pictured himself lying hidden beside it, waiting his chance to climb onto a goods train, and offered thanks for the stroke of luck that had saved him that hazardous experiment. Then he reflected that Chester J. Veness should have said railroad, hop, and freight car; and turned again to studying his part.

He was interrupted by the sudden braking of the car and Claire's voice, low and tense, saying, "Chester! Police barricade! Cross your fingers and pray as you never prayed before."

Chapter Thirteen

REUNION AT THE ROGANO

THEY WERE IN A picturesque little village—Bridge of Orchy, it must be—and the “barricade” consisted of two police constables watched by three or four small children. Claire pulled up, and one of the constables opened the near-side door. “Good evening,” he said, “I wonder if I might see your driving license, please?”

“Surely,” said Claire, and opened her handbag. “It’s an American one. There’s my British permit. My husband doesn’t drive, so he doesn’t have one.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” said the policeman, and proceeded to study both documents closely. His companion lounged forward and stared at Colin. Then he spoke.

“You’ll be going to Oban, likely?” he said.

“No,” said Claire, “to Glasgow.”

“Just that, just that. Will you have come far, I wonder?”

“No,” said Claire again, “only from Kingshouse—in Glencoe, you know.”

“Aye, aye, just that. Kingshouse. Oh, aye, fine I know Kingshouse. My sister Mary works in the hotel. You’ll be the American lady that’s been staying there, very likely. She was telling me you were very kind to her.”

“Well, it’s certainly nice to hear that.” Claire sounded cautious, and with reason, Colin felt. He did not like the way this conversation was going at all.

“Aye, aye. Mistress Veness, isn’t it? Aye, aye, just that. And this gentleman is your husband? Aye. I’m just wondering, now, did Mary mention Mr. Veness being there at all? I don’t just mind that she did.”

For the first time Colin spoke. “I guess she didn’t,” he said, “for the simple reason that I *wasn’t* there. I’ve been up in Inverness the last couple of weeks. I came down to Fort William today, and my wife met me there. Say, that

Caledonian Canal of yours certainly is a wonderful waterway. Yes, indeedy." The faint pressure of Claire's knee warned him that his accent was becoming *déclassé* again, and he decided to omit the trimmings.

"Inverness, is it? Aye, aye. And you sailed down to-day?"

On the point of assenting, Colin paused. There had been an undercurrent of suppressed eagerness in the constable's voice that seemed out of all proportion to the simple question. He scented a trap. Probably there was no boat on Thursdays, or something. He played safe.

"No," he said, "I traveled by bus. You get a very good view of the canal, though."

"Aye, aye, just that. Now I wonder why would I be getting the impression that Mary was saying Mistress Veness was a widow lady?"

There as an electric silence that seemed to last for hours. "I—I—" Claire began, and gave up. Colin decided to take a chance.

"I wonder," he said. "Say honey, maybe you were telling her about poor Bill?"

"Mum—maybe I was," said Claire shakily.

"My wife's first husband, officer, was killed in the war. She may have mentioned that to your sister, without happening to mention she'd remarried." If the pestilential Mary had been in the hotel in 1944, when the real Veness visited it, they were sunk, for the coincidence of names would be too much to swallow. Nobody marries two successive husbands called Veness. Otherwise, there was a chance.

The constable hesitated. Clearly, he was not yet satisfied. Equally clearly, he was not quite sure of his next move. And then Fate lent a hand—indeed, a whole arm.

The other officer, who had been examining Claire's licenses, now folded them and bent forward to give them back to her. As he did so, his hand brushed against Colin's coat. There was a snarl and a flash of white, and the uniform sleeve was gripped firmly in Susie's teeth.

"Susie!" Claire cried. "Bad dog!" Susie laid back her

ears, but hung on.

"Susie!" Colin's voice held a warning. "Let go this minute." Solemnly he tapped the long white nose with one finger. Susie let go, but continued to watch the constable warily.

"I'm sorry, officer," said Colin, "I guess she thought you were going to take a poke at me."

"That's all right, sir—no harm done. Seems to be a faithful beast."

"She is," said Colin. "She's been with me that long now, I guess she thinks I'm the whole world."

"They get like that," agreed the constable. And then a startling sound rent the air—a hoarse cracking that proved, amazingly, to be hearty laughter from the other constable—he who had doubted.

"My grief, Angus," he gasped, "but I thought the brute would have had the arm off of you!" He doubled up in renewed laughter.

And so, his sincerity proved by the obviously lifelong attachment of a dog, Chester J. Veness bade a courteous good night to the Law, and Claire drove on. If the doubter had had any doubts left, Susie had dispelled them. Ogilvie *might* have terrified a woman into helping him, but it was clearly impossible that he could have so got around a dog. Which theory displays, if you examine it, almost equal ignorance of dogs and women.

They had driven a full mile before Claire broke the silence. "That," she said, "was the stickiest moment of my life. You were superb. I even forgive you for saying 'I guess' so often."

"I'm sorry I had to drag your husband into it. It seemed—almost indecent."

"Bill would have hated to have been left out of it. Bill would have enjoyed every minute of that—that inferno. He was the same sort of crazy guy you are."

Colin grinned, but said nothing. His pulse was not yet quite steady again.

A few minutes later they left Argyll behind and crossed the county border into Perth. The broad highway ended

shortly afterward at a tee-junction with the Oban road, and they turned left for Tyndrum. There they were stopped again, but without incident, and they began to feel much more confident as they purred through Strathfillan to Crianlarich.

A third police block at that point proved that the authorities were sparing no effort in their search, but the Merlin was passed through with only a cursory glance. And off they went down Glen Falloch.

A pleasant river wound with the road here, and Colin actually found himself enjoying the scenery. He said so. Claire glanced at him briefly.

"I wish I had your nerve," she said. "Me, I keep seeing imaginary bars ahead of me. Do they cut women's hair in the jails in this country?"

"I wouldn't know," said Colin. "I'm only a Yank." Claire glanced at him again and grinned, but said nothing.

The county changed again near the foot of the glen, and they drove on into Dumbartonshire, the river accompanying them as they went. Then it debouched into a narrow loch. They sped through a small village, and the scenery became lovelier than ever.

"I hope you know where we are," said Claire, "for I don't."

"I surely do, honey. We're on the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch Lomond. And as I remember them, they call for careful driving."

"They're worth it," said Claire, and slowed down a little as the twisting road led them from view to delightful view.

They passed through Tarbet, and saw the steep sides of Ben Lomond and Ben Uird rising almost sheer from their reflections on the still surface. Inverbeg fell behind, and then suddenly the loch tripled its width, and a sprinkle of green wooded islands studded its waters. It was very beautiful.

Luss was basking in the last of the sunshine as they drove through it, and twenty minutes later they came to

Balloch and the beginning of the long summer evening. They bore right for Dumbarton, and the scenery became first urban and then frankly industrial.

"‘And so it is with regret,’" Colin quoted, "‘that we say farewell to Bonnie Scotland.’ From now on, my dear, we’re as good as in Glasgow—or as bad. There’s still fifteen miles or so to go, but they’re all pretty much like this. We’ve had the Highlands."

"If I thought we’d also had the police, I’d be better company. Why do you suppose there haven’t been any more road blocks?"

"Not much point in it, I imagine, south of Crianlarich, unless they’re going to put one at every crossroad in the country, which they obviously can’t. I fancy they’ve plastered them all round the danger area, but that outside of that they’re relying on the usual measures—men at the docks and stations and airfields, plus a general appeal to the public."

"D’you think they’ll have men at the—which is it?—the Central Station in Glasgow?"

"Sure to."

"Oh!"

"We’ll just have to stand or fall on the disguise, Claire, and after all, it’s done well by us so far."

"Yes, but— Ah, let’s enjoy the ride! Our next one may be in the patrol wagon." They drove on through the crowded streets, talking of other things.

Claire broached the subject of food, and Colin agreed that he was as likely to be arrested, skulking around back streets, as he was by going boldly into a public restaurant. And they had to do something till traintime. She, it appeared, knew a restaurant in Glasgow, the Rogano, where good sea food could be obtained. She had been taken there for dinner by one Armstrong, Glasgow manager of the Northern National Bank, with which her New York bank was associated, and whither she had naturally gone on her arrival in Scotland. Mr. Armstrong had also arranged the hire of the Merlin V-eight, apparently, and the reservation of her accommodation in

Glencoe. All in all, he had given Claire a very rosy impression of Scottish banks and hospitality, though Colin doubted if that had been his basic motive. Anyway, she thought she could find the place again; and in due course did so. They parked the car in Susie's care and went in.

Just inside the door Claire left him. "I'm going to call the Kingshouse Hotel," she said, "and tell them I changed my plans and won't be back tonight. Otherwise they'll start in worrying about what's happened to me. And after all I've been through, I'd hate to be arrested for stealing a lunch basket. You go right ahead and get us a table, Chester. I'll be with you in five minutes."

Colin went right ahead, down a long, L-shaped room with a snack counter on its left and some armchairs and a cocktail bar on its right. It was a bright, pleasantly decorated place—there were some extremely tasty mermaids over the snack counter, he noticed—and it reminded him that he had not eaten for five hours.

The lateral portion of the "L," just below the cocktail bar, contained tables, and a waiter promised him one of them in fifteen minutes' time. That left an interval suitable for the consumption of a couple of drinks, he felt, so he went over to the bar. There was quite a crowd round it, but he edged his way in and called for two rye highballs. It seemed a reasonable tippie for Veness to order, and would certainly be a pleasant one for Ogilvie to consume. Then he looked up the room, and saw Claire entering. He waved, and she walked toward him. As she did so, a cheerful, bald-headed man detached himself from the bar and intercepted her with outstretched hand. "How *are* you, Mrs. Veness?" he said warmly. "I thought you were in the far north. What are you drinking?"

Who the mischief could this be, Colin wondered, and answered himself immediately. It must be the gallant bank manager, Mr. Armstrong. Obviously the Rogano was one of his haunts, so it was quite reasonable that he should be there. But it was also annoying, for he probably knew that Claire was a widow, in which case they

would have to find a new role for himself, and he disliked changing lies in midstream. It was apt to be confusing.

Claire was shaking hands with the man now, and explaining that she already had a drink lined up, thank you. So that was that. Introductions were inevitable. Colin stepped forward.

"Chester," said Claire, "this is Mr. Armstrong. Mr. Armstrong, my"—she caught Colin's eye, and paused on the brink—"my very dear friend, Chester Van Dyne."

"Pleased to meet you," said the bank manager.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Armstrong," said Colin, and wondered how long his assumed accent would remain consistent. They might be stuck with this fellow for dinner, in which case it would be subjected to a considerable strain.

"And when did you leave Glencoe, Mrs. Veness?" Armstrong asked. "I thought you were staying on for another week?"

"I am," said Claire, "but I met Mr. Van Dyne in Fort William this morning and decided to run down to Glasgow with him. I'm going back to Kingshouse tomorrow." She saw the slightly startled look on the banker's face, and hastened to correct his misapprehension. "Mr. Van Dyne is traveling to London tonight."

Armstrong's face cleared. "Is he, though?" he said. "That's a coincidence. I've got a young lady with me—one of our clients—she's in the cloakroom at the moment—she's going south tonight too. Are you catching the nine-thirty, Mr. Van Dyne?"

"I—er—I guess. I haven't decided yet," said Colin, mentally resolving to catch anything rather than the nine-thirty. He had no desire to be saddled with a traveling companion to whom he would have to talk his phony American for several hours.

"You ought to. It's the best train. Gets in at six thirty-five in the morning. I'm just taking this young lady down to the Malmaison for a bite of supper and then putting her on the train, so we'll probably— Ah! Here

she comes.”

Colin glanced casually sideways, and his stomach turned over. Tripping toward them, looking like a million dollars in a black woolen outfit and a black hat, came Avril Trent!

Vaguely he heard Armstrong lower his voice and murmur something about, “Mourning, poor child—recent bereavement—great shock,” and then the girl had reached them, and he was mechanically shaking hands, while a voice that seemed to have no connection with him told Miss Trent that it was glad to know her.

Miss Trent, in turn, was charmed to meet him, and also, to judge by her expression, slightly puzzled. “Haven’t we met somewhere before, Mr. Van Dyne?” she asked. “I can’t help feeling—”

He took a firm grip on himself. “I don’t think so, Miss Trent,” he said, “and I guess I wouldn’t be likely to forget a thing like that.” He laughed with hollow heartiness.

“Are you certain? There’s something awfully familiar about your face.”

“He’s a common type, Miss Trent,” said Claire, coming to the rescue. “You see dozens of them in the magazines, advertising toothpaste and tuxedos. They’re the lowest common denominator of American manhood. Aren’t you, dear?”

They all laughed politely, but it was quite obvious that the girl was unconvinced. She continued to study Colin, and when Armstrong pointed out that it was time they were moving she seemed very reluctant to go. “Couldn’t we have something to eat here?” she suggested.

“Well—” Armstrong was clearly not enthusiastic. “I’ve booked a table at the Malmaison, you know, and it’s just beside the station, so we won’t have to worry about getting a taxi afterward. Besides, we had lunch here. I’d like to show you a bit more of Glasgow before you go.”

“Why don’t you and Mr. Van Dyne come along to the Malmaison, too, Mrs. Veness?” Miss Trent suggested

next.

"Well," said Claire, "I think you already arranged for a table here, didn't you, Chester?"

"Yes," said Colin with feigned regret, "I guess I did."

"Mr. Van Dyne's traveling down to London tonight, too, you know," said Armstrong shrewdly, and the girl brightened immediately.

"Oh?" she said. "Oh, I *am* glad. I do hate not having company on a journey. Well, we'll be meeting you at the station, then? By, by, Mrs. Veness. Au revoir, Mr. Van Dyne." She smiled winningly and departed. Armstrong made his adieux, took his hat from a peg, and followed. Colin emptied his glass in one gulp, and ordered a refill. He needed it badly.

"That," he said, "was the worst five minutes I've ever lived through. You realize who she is?"

"Of course I do. When I heard her name my heart went down below my girdle some place and my stomach came up in my throat. Of all the unlucky breaks!"

"Did you see the way she looked at me? I didn't like it at all."

"Nor did I. And if I really *was* your wife I'd have liked it still less."

"I didn't mean that. I think she was more than half-way to recognizing me. Didn't you notice how she kept looking at my face? She didn't take her eyes off me."

"Sure, I noticed. Look, Chester, that ravening she-wolf couldn't take her eyes off *anything* that was tall, dark, and handsome—even if the dark *is* phony."

Colin shook his head. "You're wrong, Claire. She may be all you say, but this time her interest wasn't social. She was trying to place me. And any minute she may succeed."

Mrs. Veness gave a short bark of satiric laughter. "Remind me," she said, "to tell you all about the bees and the pollen sometime. She placed you all right, honey—in Category A for Avril."

Colin grinned mischievously. "I can't think why you dislike the poor kid," he said innocently. "I thought she

looked rather touching, in mourning for her—”

“Mourning! Hah! That was no mourning—that was a hunting costume. Come on, let’s eat.”

They were well started on an excellent sole Mornay and a pleasant hock before she spoke again, and when she did it was on a quite unexpected topic. “What’s this Malmaison place, Chester?” she asked.

“It’s a restaurant—part of the Central Hotel, really.”

“Expensive?”

“Yes, as far as I remember. Why?”

“I thought so, from dear Mr. Armstrong’s tone. *Dear Mr. Armstrong*—all smiles and city manners! Why’s he want to take La Belle Trent to a more expensive place than he took me?” Her indignation was not very convincing. “Do I really look my age, Chester? I swear you’re the only man who knows I’m growing old disgracefully above the ears.”

“Well, he’s a banker, after all. Maybe he thinks she represents a better investment.”

“A quicker turnover,” said Claire vulgarly, and stabbed the sole with her fork. Colin laughed aloud and, after a wholly unsuccessful attempt to scowl at him, she joined in. They finished their meal in perfect amity.

At nine-fifteen they drove up the carriageway into the Central Station and parked the car. Colin said a sad farewell to the wistful Susie, took the suitcase—it was a necessary piece of camouflage, they had decided, and he could send it back from London—and led the way toward the ticket offices. Well short of them, however, he paused. A policeman was standing idly by the main-line window. He took out his wallet and extracted some notes, handing them to Claire. “D’you mind?” he said. “It may be sheer coincidence, but I don’t want to take any avoidable risks.”

She nodded comprehension, took the money, and went off. Colin looked up at the departure indicator. The nine-thirty, he saw, left from Platform Two, so he would do well to steer clear of that vicinity. There was a second train at nine-forty, which he proposed to take, but he

had no urge to explain that fact to Avril Trent. The less that young lady saw of him the better, for, despite Claire's uncharitable interpretation of her interest, he was quite certain that she had been on the verge of recognizing him, and that even now identification lay only just below the surface of her conscious mind.

Claire came back with his ticket, and they strolled in silence toward Platform Nine, where the nine-forty awaited its release. Now that they were about to part they were both tongue-tied, and the inevitably melancholy atmosphere of a great terminus did nothing to help.

"I do hope you'll be successful, Colin," she said at last, rather stiltedly.

"Thank you," said Colin, with equal awkwardness. "If I am, it will be entirely due to you."

"I did very little."

"You did everything. And you risked everything too. It's devilish hard to put into words, Claire—it's too big a thing—but—well—I'll never forget this. Never. I—"

"Don't try to say it," she said, and linked her arm in his. "Let's just agree it's been fun. And maybe one of these days we'll get together again, and you can tell me the end of the story. I'll be stopping over in London a couple of nights on my way home, and—"

"If I'm not behind bars we'll get in front of one, and I'll give you the best meal you ever had in your life, though it won't be a patch on the one you gave me this morning. Wire me at the Absentees Club when to expect you, and I'll—"

"Aha!" said Mr. Armstrong's jovial voice. "There you are, are you? We were wondering what had happened to you." And he and Avril Trent swept alongside.

Hesitantly Colin explained that, as he had not reserved a sleeping compartment on the nine-thirty, he thought he had better travel by the later train. Miss Trent looked daggers at Claire, whom she obviously blamed for this decision, but Armstrong brushed aside the explanation. "Nonsense," he said. "You travel by the nine-

thirty. It's much the better train—the other one's a lot slower. We'll easily get you a sleeper. Come on." And without waiting for an answer he hustled the party toward Platform Two.

As they approached the barrier Colin's anxious eye spotted two stalwart gentlemen in trilby hats standing beside it, in talk with a railway official, and for a moment his heart failed him. Somehow these keen-faced, quietly dressed plain-clothes men seemed far more menacing than their uniformed colleagues had been. But Armstrong was urging him forward, and in any event he knew that the slightest hesitation or apparent nervousness would be fatal.

They walked straight to the barrier, and Colin felt the two pairs of eyes boring into him. And then—What in heaven's name was Armstrong playing at? He had gripped Colin's arm and was leading him firmly up to the detectives and the railway official. Was this jovial little man a decoy, then, planted to identify him before the police acted? Had he fallen into a trap, as simple as it was unexpected? His brain whirled, and for a moment he thought of making a bolt for it. And then Armstrong spoke. "Good evening, Inspector," he said. "Evening, Mr. Shaw."

"Good evening, Mr. Armstrong," said the railway official, while the taller of the two detectives nodded.

"Mr. Shaw, I wonder if you could do me a favor?"

"Glad to if I can, Mr. Armstrong."

"This is Mr. Van Dyne, a friend of mine."

"How do you do, sir?" said Mr. Shaw.

"Glad to know you," said Colin automatically, and shook a hard hand.

"Mr. Van Dyne's very anxious to travel on the nine-thirty, Mr. Shaw, but he hasn't booked a sleeper. I wonder if you could manage to squeeze him in somewhere?"

"Oh, I think we could manage that all right," said Mr. Shaw confidently. "I don't think the train's very full. First class, would it be, sir?"

"Absolutely first class," said Colin absently, and was

startled by the laughter which greeted this inane remark. As in a dream he found himself following Shaw up the platform, while Armstrong and the two women tagged on behind. He could hardly believe it had happened. Not only had the bank manager *not* been an agent of the detectives, he had actually vouched for the fictitious Van Dyne in front of them. Even at the cost of traveling with Avril Trent, it was a bit of help worth having.

A sleeping compartment was found for him—in the same coach as the girl's, he learned with misgiving—and the party of four split into its natural halves and stood talking in the desultory, uncomfortable way so typical of departure platforms. A warning whistle blew, and Colin took both of Claire's hands in his.

"God bless you, my dear," he said. "I'll remember this all my life."

"So will I. It's been— Oh— Well— So—" He slipped his arms around her and kissed her gently. For a moment she was stiff in his grasp, and then her body relaxed and she pressed against him. He lifted his head and looked down at her. "Good night, Claire," he said softly.

"Good night, darling." Her eyes were very bright, and she blinked twice. "Have a—have a safe journey, and"—she was obviously forcing herself back to lightness—"and keep out of that she-wolf's lair, Red Riding Hood—she don't mean right by our Chester."

"Do you think I'm mad?"

"No, honey. Male." A second whistle blew, and Colin followed Miss Trent aboard the train. It moved off, accelerating smoothly, and he craned his neck at the corridor window for a last glimpse of the small tweed-clad figure on the platform. She looked, somehow, rather forlorn.

Then he stepped back and turned, to find Avril Trent studying him intently. Her exquisite eyebrows were set in a frown of deep concentration—the frown of one who is just on the point of recalling a temporarily mislaid memory.

Chapter Fourteen

AND SO TO LONDON

COLIN SAT ON THE EDGE of his bed as the train raced southward, and sank ever deeper in gloom. Had he come through so much and got so far only to be beaten by this million-to-one chance—his ill-starred meeting with Avril Trent? True, he had come safely out of that sticky moment in the corridor, just after they left Central. He had made some feeble joke or other, brought her mind back to the present, and eventually left her at her compartment, but only on a promise to join her there for a drink as soon as he had "settled himself in."

Well, that had been half an hour ago, and all he had succeeded in settling himself into was a mood of mingled despondency and trepidation. And now the ticket collector had been round, as had the car attendant. It was the open season for visiting, presumably. He sighed, rose, and straightened his tie at the mirror. He had better go along, he supposed. Otherwise she was quite capable of coming to fetch him. He looked out into the corridor and saw, with regret, that the coast was clear.

Her door shot open at his knock, and he slipped inside quickly, noting that the compartment smelled pleasantly of expensive perfume. He also noted, uncomfortably, that Avril at least had settled herself into something—a flame-colored chiffon negligee that withheld little relevant information about its wearer. If her black outfit was a hunting costume, this had surely been designed for the kill. Her hair was loose, as it had been on that memorable night in Tyndor, and she really looked very charming as she smiled a welcome. "Have you brought your tooth glass?" she asked softly.

"I certainly did." He kept his voice equally low.

"Good. Do sit down. Can you drink brandy, because that's all I have."

"Just try me."

"That's marvelous. I shan't be a minute." She squatted to extract a bottle from the small traveling case that lay on the floor, and her wrap divided artlessly to reveal long, slim legs. Colin groaned inwardly. He knew this routine from A to whatever letter his hostess cared to stop at, but he had never felt less like airing his knowledge. In other circumstances he could have enjoyed the situation thoroughly—in other circumstances he *had* enjoyed the situation thoroughly—but, as things were, Miss Trent's undeniable attractiveness left him cold. And it was the cold of fear.

"There," she smiled, and handed him a handsome measure. "See what you think of that." She raised her own glass and looked at him over the brim. "Happy nights," she murmured.

"And soft awakenings," said Colin gallantly, and drank deep. It was an excellent brandy anyway.

"How I needed that!" she said, and sat on the bed beside him, the wrap again dividing artlessly as per plan. She made an unsuccessful but almost convincing attempt to pull it together.

"You did, huh? Guess you had a tiring day." He seized eagerly at the chance to make a gracefully early departure.

"Oh, much worse than that. I've had a too, too *dreadful* experience!"

Too late Colin saw where the conversation was leading. But he was bound by his cues and could only follow. "What was that, sweetie?" he asked concernedly.

"I've been staying at a country house in Morvern—Tyndor it's called." She paused and looked at him, obviously awaiting results. Colin, remembering that press and radio must have plastered the name all over the public consciousness, reacted creditably.

"Tyndor!" he repeated. "Say, isn't that the place where that guy got killed night before last?"

She nodded. "Yes," she said, "it is. I—I was in the very next room." She gave a little gasp, and her eyes dilated

at the recollection. Colin slipped a comforting arm round her shoulders, and she snuggled close to him. The expensive perfume became more noticeable, and for a moment his mind wandered. Resolutely, he snapped back to business.

"Now look, Avril," he said pleadingly, "you don't want to think about a thing like that. You want to put it right out of your mind, and talk about something else." And never, he reflected, had he meant anything more sincerely. If she started to recall the night of the murder, she was going to visualize it, scene by scene. And when she conjured up the grim tableau that the lights had revealed in Scwell's room, she would see again the face of the kilted figure at bay by the window—the face of the supposed murderer: *his* face. Which was the last thing he wanted her to dwell on at that moment.

"But I do want to talk about it." Her upturned face wore a piteous expression. "If I bottle it up I'll go mad. Chester. I *must* talk about it."

He made a last, despairing effort. "But look, Avril, surely you've talked about it enough—to the police and the reporters, for instance? Don't you figure it would be better now to forget—"

"The police and the reporters!" Her voice dismissed both classes with contempt. "Of course I've told them all about it—over and over again. And the people in the hotel in Oban last night. But they're only interested in *physical* things. 'Where were you standing? What did you hear? Who did you see?' They're not interested in what I *felt*—what happened *inside* me. And if I don't tell someone what it *meant* to me, I'll—I'll— Oh, Chester, can't you understand? It's *sympathy* I need—someone wise and kind and strong to listen to me and—and *help* me."

Colin gave up the struggle. "Sure, sweetie, sure," he said soothingly. "You go right ahead and pour out your woes to Poppa. I guess I—well, I guess I ought to be kind of flattered, at that."

She sat up brightly. "Oh, I *knew* you'd understand!"

she said. "Let's fill up our glasses first, shall we, and then I'll tell you all about it."

The glasses having been more than generously dealt with, she kicked off her mules, swung her feet under her, and returned comfortably to the crook of his arm. "Well," she said, "it really started ten days ago, when I got an invitation."

Step by step her tale unfolded—the invitation from Sewell, her delight that the Master could find relaxation and (strictly platonic) pleasure in her simple company, the journey to Scotland, the arrival at Tyndor, the Master's preoccupation with some private worry and her fruitless attempts to make him unburden himself. She told it well, with a natural instinct for the dramatic build-up, but she also displayed an alarming descriptive ability. Manling and Partridge she pictured in a dozen words, accurately and clearly, and Colin realized, unhappily, that she had a considerable gift of observation.

Inexorably she closed in on her climax: told how she had left the men downstairs and gone up to bed, only to be wakened by shouting and banging that seemed to come from next door; how she had risen and, after much hesitation, unlocked the connecting door and looked into the darkness of Sewell's room; how Manling had come through her room and switched on the lights.

"And there," she said, her voice almost hysterical, "there on the floor—Oh!" She paused, shuddering; and Colin took his chance. Dropping his empty glass on the coverlet, he grabbed her forcibly in both arms and hugged her till she was breathless.

"Not one more word, sweetie," he said sternly. "Gee, I must have been crazy to ever let you start at all! Getting yourself all worked up like that! You poor kid."

"But—but—"

"No, Avril! Not another word's coming out of that pretty little mouth of yours." And, to enforce the ruling, he kissed her firmly and at length. She had no palpable objections.

His horn-rimmed glasses, he found, interfered with

these activities, and he pocketed them, without, however, lessening his grip. And then for thirty not unenjoyable minutes he continued to hold, stroke, pat, soothe, and cosset her, murmuring all the sympathetic and sentimental nonsense he could think of and, when inspiration failed or she looked like interrupting, kissing her again.

Initially, balked of her denouement, she accepted the attentions at their face value, but tried to get back to the story. Gradually, however, she came to take an interest in the proceedings for their own sake. Later he found it unnecessary to keep talking. And finally her even, regular breathing told him that she was asleep. He drew his cramped arm out from behind her, stood up, and relaxed. It was over now, but at one time it had looked a very close thing indeed.

Gently he pulled back the coverlet, eased her head down to the pillow, straightened her knees, and tucked her up. She looked very young as she lay there, and he had a momentary pang of remorse at his deception. Then he reflected that, had they met in totally different circumstances, he would probably have made a little mild love to her anyway; remembered that she had seemed to be enjoying it; and felt slightly better.

He bent down and lightly kissed her forehead. Her eyes opened, and she smiled up at him.

"Good night, my dear," he said quietly.

"Night night, angel." Her voice was drowsy, and her eyes closed again. He straightened up, switched off the lights, and went out.

As he walked down the rocking corridor he reflected, with neither originality nor profit, that the only funnier thing in this world than women was men; by which term, of course, he meant himself. Here was he, Colin Ogilvie, kissing women right and left with ease and nonchalance—Claire on the platform, Avril in the train—and, charming though they were and delightful though it was, it just didn't mean a thing—not *that* way. Claire had been friendship and affection; Avril had been ex-

pedience and fun.

Yet when it came to Kay—with whom, he knew instinctively, it would mean a great deal—he found himself mugging chance after chance with the gaucherie of a schoolboy at his first “grown-up” party. There was some good explanation for it, no doubt—in the works of Freud, probably—but it was galling nonetheless. He shrugged, and entered his own compartment. The bed looked very inviting, and he realized that he had not slept between sheets for a long time.

Automatically glancing at the mirror, he noted two patches of lipstick on his cheek, and rubbed them off with his handkerchief. Otherwise, all correct. He was just turning away when the horrid truth struck him. His reflection *was* all correct—for Colin Ogilvie. But without the aid of the dark-rimmed glasses, his dyed hair and scanty mustache lost more than half their value. He looked, in fact, dangerously like himself. And that was the face he had last presented to Avril Trent.

He remembered the moment clearly—her eyes opening as he bent over and said, “Good night, my dear.” And that gave him his second shock, for he was practically certain, now that he thought of it, that he had spoken in his natural accent, with no trace of the pseudo-transatlantic twang.

True, she had been two-thirds asleep at the time. But there was no guarantee that she would not recall the incident in the morning, and at last solve the problem of where she had first met Chester J. Van Dyne. He cursed his own stupidity, and resolved to get clear of the train without the formality of farewells. It might be ungallant, but the alternative might be fatal.

At six o'clock he awoke from deep, luxurious sleep, got up, drank a pint of cold water, and started to shave, noting grimly that his mustache, though slightly bigger, had suspiciously fair roots. The train was running through the London suburbs now, and would probably be in on time. He hurried into his clothes, adjusted his

glasses, lifted the suitcase, and went out, carefully shutting the door behind him.

The front of the train was his objective, but for a moment the thought of passing Avril's door held him back. Then he realized that he was being foolish, and began to walk forward. But he did not breathe easily until he was in the next coach.

He passed through several coaches and met stray passengers in various stages of undress, carrying sponge bags and towels and looking as if they had decided to travel by day next time. Then he reached a locked door, and knew that he had come as far as he could. There was nothing to do now but wait, and hope that Avril would not identify him in time to raise a hue and cry on the train.

Ten long minutes passed, and then he felt the engine slowing up. Points clanked underfoot, and high stone walls channeled the tracks on each side. A platform appeared below the window, and luggage trolleys, pillars, porters, and finally a row of taxis crossed his line of vision with steadily lessening speed. Euston at last. He opened the door, ready to jump.

The tickets had been collected shortly after leaving Glasgow, so there would be no barrier to pass. That was one consolation. And if he could grab the leading taxi in the rank— The train checked for a moment, and he was on the platform, running for the first cab. The driver saw him and reached back to open the door. He chucked in the suitcase, followed it, said "Waterloo Station, please—in a hurry," and sank back on the cushions. As the door slammed he heard that great steamy sigh that locomotives give at their journey's end. And then they were off.

Waterloo had been a spur-of-the-moment idea but not, he thought on reflection, a bad one. The implication that he was trying to make a train connection would justify his desire for speed, and if he was to fog his trail successfully—as he must—then Waterloo was a better place than most.

They drove, as London taxis always do, through streets he had never seen before and would probably not recognize again. But the route was undoubtedly the most direct and, as there was little traffic at that hour, they traveled fast. In a very few minutes they had crossed the river and were winding up the long approach to Waterloo Station.

"Will you catch it all right, sir?" asked the driver, as Colin paid him.

"Ten minutes to spare, thanks," said Colin, and walked smartly into the station. Sixty seconds later he walked smartly out again and hailed another taxi. "King's Cross, please—in a hurry," he said, and sat back out of sight.

At King's Cross he went to the washroom, removed his raincoat, stowed it in the suitcase with his kilt, left the case in the luggage office, marched out, and took a taxi to Victoria—in a hurry.

All of this, he admitted, might be quite unnecessary. But he could not afford to take chances. If Avril's memory did click when she woke up—and he had a strong hunch that it would—then the police would start their search at Euston, and the more complicated his movements were from there, the better. Eventually, of course, they would follow the taxi trail to Victoria; but that was bound to take time—enough time, at any rate, for him to have left the place and further confused the issue with a few busses and tubes.

He paid off the taxi and walked into the station. As he rounded the corner of the archway he remembered that it was here he had first met Kay—how many years ago? Five days. Five *days*? But what days they had been! He went into a phone box and dialed the house in Lancaster Gate.

A maid answered him, and gave him his first check. No, she was sorry, but Miss Loring was *not* here. She had left yesterday. Colin's spirits sank abruptly.

"Do you know where she's gone?" he asked.

"I'm not certain, sir. Home, I think."

"St. Leonards? Or the Knightsbridge flat?"

"I couldn't be sure, sir, I'm afraid. Madame would know, but she's still asleep, and I shouldn't like to disturb her unless it's urgent."

"Thank you," said Colin. "Please don't trouble her. I'll ring again." He hung up. This was a blow, but there was nothing he could do about it except cast round till he found her. He dialed the Knightsbridge number. It rang monotonously for a long time, but at last he heard a click, followed—and his heart leaped at the sound—by Kay's voice. "Hullo?" she said.

"Is that you, Kay?"

There was a pause. Then, "Who—who is that?"

"I'd rather not mention names, but who else would phone you in the small hours of the morning?"

He heard her catch her breath, and wished he could see her face. So much depended on her attitude now. If she did think he was guilty—Blazes, she couldn't! She just *must* believe in him. But she wasn't saying anything. The silence was becoming uncomfortable. "Kay," he said. "Kay, are you still there?"

"Yes, I'm still here." There was a tremor in her voice. "Where are you?"

"In a phone booth. Kay, I don't want to talk too plainly, but—do you believe everything you read in the newspapers?"

"Not always. But sometimes it's—difficult not to."

"It isn't true. Kay, do you hear me? I say it isn't true."

"I wish I could believe that."

"I wish you would, for on my soul and honor I mean it. Look here. Are you alone in the flat?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I'm coming round to see you. I can't talk over a telephone, but if I saw you I think I could convince you."

"Oh, don't come round! I don't— Yes. Come round if you like. Oh, I don't know what I ought to do."

"I'm coming round, and I'm asking you not to do anything till you've seen me. After that, I'll put myself

in your hands, and you can do what you think best. Is that a bet?"

There was a very slight pause, but when she spoke the tremor had gone completely. "Yes, that's a bet. I'll be waiting for you." The receiver clicked and the dialing tone crackled in his ear.

Well, he thought, as he came out of the booth, it wasn't a certainty by any means, but at least it still left him a sporting chance. He had meant to make a round-about way to her but, in the circumstances, speed was probably more valuable than camouflage. He crossed the forecourt and stepped into a No. 52 bus that was standing at the terminus opposite.

A charwoman washing down the steps of Wellington Court scarcely looked up at him as he passed, and he saw no other soul as he took the lift to the top floor. A small side stair led from there up to Stanley's flat, and as he climbed it he was wondering what exactly he was going to say to Kay. He had talked glibly of convincing her in a personal interview, but he had really no concrete ideas on the subject. And Kay, he reflected ruefully, was the one person before whom his customary fluency dried like a burn in summer. Ah well. He would just leave it to the inspiration of the moment, and hope for the best. He pressed the bell push and tried to level his breathing.

The door opened, and there was Kay. In a house coat of green brocade that covered her from neck to ankle, she looked lovelier even than he had remembered, and he realized with a jolt just how much he had missed her. She showed some slight surprise at his changed appearance, but made no comment.

"Come in," she said, and spoke no further word till they were sitting in the lounge. Then, her flawless face still unsmiling, she looked at him inquiringly. "Well?" she asked.

"Kay, I— Oh Lord! I thought if I saw you— Look! On the solemnest oath you care to name, I swear I didn't kill Sewell. I've a lot to tell you, and I want your help,

but that can wait. The first thing is that you must believe me. Do you?"

She hesitated, and her face was troubled. "I want to. I want to terribly. But— You must admit it looks black, Colin."

"Jet black. I admit it freely."

"If you didn't kill him, who did?"

"Manling, I think, or possibly Doctor Partridge. Though Lord knows how they did it."

"But it was your knife."

"Was that in the papers?"

"No. Alan Drexter told me. I had lunch with him yesterday. He told me all about it."

"Does he think I'm guilty?"

"I'm afraid he does. What else *can* he think, Colin?"

"I suppose you're right, but it's a blow. Kay, I've got to see Drexter before I give myself up. That's why I've had all this song and dance getting to London, and that's why I want your help. But if he thinks I'm guilty it may be difficult."

"Before you—before you give yourself up?"

"Yes. You don't think I'm going to stay on the run all my life, do you? As soon as I've talked to Drexter I'm going to the police."

"Oh! I—I didn't realize—"

"For Pete's sake! What did you think I was going to do? Get out of England, or something?"

Her expression showed that she had thought just that, but she said nothing. He shook his head. "Look, Kay," he said, "I wish you'd realize that I'm not guilty. And if you're not guilty in this country you've nothing to fear from the police." Sincerely he hoped that that rather smug article of national faith would be justified. "They'll probably reprimand me for wasting their time and energy as I have done, but that's the worst they'll do. I'm not worried at all about the murder charge." Somewhere inside his brain a small voice murmured, "Famous Last Words," but he resolutely ignored it.

Kay's eyes were fixed on his face now with a sort of

wistful questioning. He met their gaze fairly; and then, at the psychological moment, grinned. Slowly, it seemed unwillingly, an answering smile crept to her lips. "You know, I'm almost beginning to believe you," she said.

"Get your womanly intuition to work on it and make the 'almost' a 'quite.'"

"I hated the thought that you'd done it, but Alan seemed so sure. It wasn't like you, somehow; not that *mean* kind of killing. But when you ran away— Well— what *could* I think?"

"Exactly what you did think. I don't blame you in the least. But you don't think it any longer?"

"No. No, I don't." She looked at him, and her whole face lit up. "Oh, Colin! If you only knew how I've felt—reading the papers, and hearing these horrible police messages on the radio, and thinking of you having to hide, and being hunted, and—and—"

"Did it mean so much to you?" His heart was thumping, for this was far more than the ordinary anxiety of a casual friend. And that light in her eyes—

But Kay, too, must have realized the implication. Even as he waited, he saw with despair the old defensive mask of easy flippancy come over her face. Her smile was faintly mocking as she replied. "Well, it's such frightful country, isn't it?" she said lightly. "All bleak and cold and wet. If it had been Sussex, now, I shouldn't have turned a hair. Come on. We're going to have breakfast. You can follow me around while I make it, and tell me the whole story. I want to know every detail, so don't leave out anything—not even the lady you were with last night."

Colin's jaw dropped. "Look," he said weakly, "when I asked you to use your womanly intuition—"

She chuckled satirically. "You bear with you, my innocent," she said, "a faint but charming fragrance of *Rêve D'Elizabeth*. These expensive perfumes are so persistent, aren't they? And as you're not exactly the type that normally uses Miss Arden's preparations, I merely assumed that you'd been—shall we say 'calling on'?—someone who does. But start right at the beginning. I can wait

for the spicy bits."

So Colin told her the whole story, following her about between kitchenette, larder, and dining-room as she prepared breakfast. He emphasized Colonel Stanley's well-being and spoke more confidently than he felt about the old man's prospects of release; he also—feeling rather disloyal—added a few years to his description of Claire; and he toned down the Avril incident considerably. Otherwise he gave her the unvarnished facts, and her face grew grave as she listened.

"So you see," he wound up—they were eating a first-class tomato omelette by this time—"I've got to get hold of Dexter and convince him that my story's true, and I've got to do it as a free man. If they capture me it will automatically discredit anything I say—they'll think I'm lying to save my neck. But if I go to Dexter voluntarily, as a prelude to giving myself up, then the chances are he'll believe me. And that's where you come in. Can you arrange that I meet Dexter—without his knowing in advance that I'm coming? *You* didn't send for the police when I phoned you, but I fancy *he* might, and I daren't risk it."

"I don't think he would, you know, but—yes, perhaps you're right. He *was* rather bitter about you yesterday—Let me think—" She concentrated deeply, while he buttered a fresh piece of toast. "He'll be at home at the moment. He doesn't go to the office till half past nine. And it's much better if we catch him at home. I know. Suppose I ring him and say that a man has called here looking for Uncle Paul. I don't know the man, but he says he used to work for Christian Retrospect and wants to sell some information, but doesn't want to go to the police."

"Will he believe that?"

"He ought to. It actually happened once, with another organization. That's why I thought of it."

"Good. And what then?"

"Well, I'll ask him to come round here and see the man, or else make an appointment."

"To come round, preferably. I'm not anxious to be seen in the streets unnecessarily, and anyway I'd like you to be there as moral support."

"Thank you. I must admit I'd like to be there too—Well, I'll go and phone him now. Help yourself to another cup of coffee." She rose and went out.

Five minutes later she returned. "Fixed it," she said, "only we've got to go round there. Alan will be working at home all morning, and can't go out, but he said he'd see you at ten-thirty if I'd send you along. So I said I'd bring you along. That all right?"

"Fine, thanks. I'm sorry I've got to appear in public, but I don't suppose it can be helped. I say! You're not still being followed by Scotland Yard, are you? I never thought of it till this minute."

"No. That nice Stanners man rang me up yesterday—I was still at Aunt Katherine's—and told me they thought it was no longer necessary. So I came back here."

"Good," said Colin. "Well, if we're not due at Drexter's place till ten-thirty, do you think I could have a bath? I had one in Loch Linnhe two days ago, but it wasn't really satisfactory."

Kay took him to Stanley's bedroom, gave him the colonel's dressing gown, and departed to her own room to dress. Five minutes later he was wallowing in the comfort of hot water, and feeling remarkably pleased with himself. The long, long trail had just about wound itself down to the straight. One more river to cross—Drexter—but he was pretty confident of crossing it. And then—He remembered that look on Kay's face, and the note in her voice when she spoke of his being hunted. She *did* care more than she was prepared to show, and one of these days he would force her to admit it. Happily, he dreamed ahead. Even the prospect of his imminent arrest on a murder charge now seemed trivial. He was innocent, so why worry? A few formalities, no doubt, a laughing apology for all the trouble he had caused, and then he would be released. No doubt. The world was a very pleasant place. He began to sing: a rollicking ditty

about the daughter of one Riley, a publican.

A knocking on the door stopped him. "Sorry," he called out. "Didn't think you'd hear me."

"Colin!" Kay sounded alarmed. "They know you're in London."

"Eh? Who knows I'm in London?"

"The police."

He sat up abruptly in the bath. "How do you know they do?" he asked.

"The radio. I switched on the nine o'clock news while I was dressing. There was a police message. 'Believed to have arrived at Euston Station this morning.' They described you too—dyed hair, and mustache, and glasses, and that suit and everything. But they said you had a raincoat and a case."

"Parked them at King's Cross. Blast! So that girl did remember after all. I was afraid she would. Well! That means I won't be able to walk five yards out of this building without being spotted. We'll have to ask Drexter to come round here after all." His rosy future had gone out like a light, and he was back in a very gloomy present.

"We can't. He told me he'd got to stay in for some phone call. But it's worse than that, Colin. Don't you see? If they know you were at Euston, they can easily find the man who drove you to Waterloo—he was on the Euston rank, wasn't he?—and then— Did you get your second cab off the Waterloo rank?"

"Yes," said Colin wretchedly, "and my third off the King's Cross rank. And then took a bus from Victoria Station to your front door! What a B.F. I am, Kay! And I thought I was being clever. They'll be round here any minute."

There was silence on the other side of the door for a few seconds. And then Kay took command. "You dry yourself," she said, "and then shave off that mustache. Uncle Paul's razor's in the cabinet. I'll put out some of his clothes for you—you're the same height, thank goodness, though I expect they'll be rather tight—and then

we'll get out of here right away. Go on. Hurry."

"Right," said Colin, and leaped out onto the bath mat.

He was back in the colonel's bedroom within three minutes, to find Kay laying out a blue single-breasted flannel suit and a polo-necked pullover. "This is the loosest thing I could find," she said. "You can leave the jacket unbuttoned, too, if you want to. I don't suppose Uncle Paul's shirts would fit you, so you'd better wear the pullover. And I'll get you a floppy hat." She bustled out, and Colin started to dress.

The trousers, he found, fitted not too badly, but the jacket was fiendishly tight across the shoulders and under the arms, and he could not have buttoned it if he had wanted to. It was a pity that he had to retain his brogues—they were badly out of keeping—but Stanley's elegant eights were out of the question. He went off in search of Kay and found her, now fully dressed, extracting a wide-brimmed Panama hat from a cupboard in the hall. She handed it to him and he put it on, pulling it well down over his eyes, then stepped back and posed for inspection.

"H'm!" she said critically. "Slightly bohemian, I feel. Especially the shoes. But it's the best we can do, I'm afraid. Keep your head down when we're passing people."

Colin studied her in turn, with considerable pleasure. Her blond head hatless, she was wearing a short-sleeved tailored frock of pale gray crepe de Chine, with a white piqué collar and lapels. Her bag, gloves, and shoes were white, too, and the general effect was delightful. He grinned. "Don't worry, dear," he said. "If you're with me, nobody's going to notice I'm there, let alone what I look like."

They reached the lift, and then the ground floor, without incident. But as they turned into the short arched passage that led out to Knightsbridge two men turned into its other end. They were big men with bowler hats, and Colin's heart dropped. He heard Kay give a tiny gasp. And then—she had done some lightning thinking—

she spoke. "Blast!" she said. "My garter! You carry on, Jack, I'll catch you up."

Colin glanced at her, saw her daintily raise her skirt to interest level, and carried on, head bent. Neither of the men gave him more than a glance in passing. They would have been more than human if they had.

A moment later Kay joined him in the street, and they hailed a taxi. No one seemed to be paying any attention to Colin, though more than one looked appreciatively at his companion, and he realized that his joke had been almost literally true. "Derry and Toms, please," said Kay as he followed her into the cab, and off they went up Knightsbridge toward Kensington.

"What do we want at Derry's?" asked Colin.

Kay nodded toward the open window behind the driver, and he closed it quietly. "We've got an hour to kill," she said, "and the best way I can think of is driving round in a taxi. If you sit well back nobody will see you. So we're going to do a little imaginary shopping. I merely chose Derry's at random. We'll do a round trip from there."

At Derry and Toms she alighted, leaving Colin in the darker corner of the waiting taxi. She came back in five minutes, told the driver to go to Bradley's in Westbourne Grove, and hopped in. The cab set off up Church Street to Bayswater.

At Bradley's the performance was repeated, and then they went to Marshall and Snelgrove's, in Oxford Street. From there they drove down Bond Street and into Piccadilly; waited briefly at Fortnum and Mason's; and then went westward again to Harrod's. It was ten-twenty when she came out of that remarkable store, so she gave the Lowndes Square address to the driver, and a few minutes later they were standing on the doorstep of Drexter's imposing home.

An elderly butler answered their ring and smiled with genuine pleasure at the girl. "Good morning, Miss Kay," he said. "Good morning, sir. Will you come in? Sir Alan's expecting you." They followed him into a lofty paneled

hall that vaguely suggested churches, and up a wide, thick-carpeted stair to the first floor. The stair wall was hung with old prints of sailing ships, Colin noticed—brigs and brigantines, barques and barquentines, schooners, sloops, and a dozen he could not name. And the whole length of the passage they had now reached seemed to be similarly decorated. Drexter evidently carried his hobby to considerable lengths.

"Sir Alan's in the library," said the butler, and showed them into a dark room lined with the mullioned glass of bookcases. At the far end, by the window, stood a massive mahogany desk, behind which sat Drexter. He rose as they entered, and greeted Kay with a smile that disappeared as he recognized Colin. His eyes flickered from face to face, and his mouth closed hard.

"What, exactly," he asked coldly, "is the meaning of this?"

Kay glanced at Colin and spoke first. "Colin had to see you, Alan," she said. "He's got some vitally important information from Uncle Paul. But he was afraid you wouldn't see him, or would just hand him over to the police. So he asked me to help. That's how it happened."

"I only want ten minutes of your time," said Colin. "After that you can ring the police. But those ten minutes I must have." There was almost a threat in his voice, but Drexter's calm remained unruffled. He looked thoughtful for a moment, then shrugged.

"I don't see what harm that can do," he said. "Kay, my dear, I should have offered you a chair. Will you? And you, Ogilvie—over there." He placed them with the air of a host at a rather formal gathering, and then sat down himself. "Well?" he said interrogatively.

"Item one on the agenda," said Colin, "is a request. Will you please try to listen without prejudice to what I'm going to say? Don't judge for or against me till I've finished. Just admit the possibility that I may be telling the truth, and listen with an open mind. Can you?"

Drexter nodded, but did not speak. "Right," said Colin; "here goes." And he proceeded to tell his story.

At first it was impossible to guess how Drexter was taking it. His face remained politely attentive, but showed no other expression. After a couple of minutes, however, he fumbled for his pipe, stuck it in his mouth, and chewed it thoughtfully. When Colin told of Stanley's discoveries his eyes narrowed, and once he gave a sigh of sudden comprehension. And when he heard of Sewell's outburst and the colonel's diagnosis of its cause, he nodded vigorously. For the remainder of the tale he listened intently but without movement. Then he looked up.

"Why didn't you tell this to the police?" he asked curtly.

"I would have done, but after my abortive attempt to bring Colonel Stanley into it I knew that the sergeant wouldn't believe me. So I waited to tell you."

"That's reasonable enough, if you'd told me right away. But this is Friday, and by your own account D-Day's tomorrow. Why waste two days playing Red Indians all over Argyll when the matter was so urgent? I can understand the impulse that made you run away in the mist, but why didn't you give yourself up when you found I wasn't at Kingairloch?"

"I still hoped to get in touch with you."

"Even so, surely you must have reconsidered it when you saw me sailing down the loch, and guessed I was heading for London. Why didn't you go to the police then?"

Colin shrugged. "Rightly or wrongly," he said, "I thought it was too late. I thought they'd probably put my surrender down to exhaustion, and dismiss my story as a fantastic attempt to confuse the Sewell issue. I wasn't even sure that they'd get in touch with you, or that you'd trouble to come north again if they did. Maybe my mind wasn't working very clearly those two days—I'd been through quite a lot, and I was in pretty poor shape—but anyway that's not the point. The point is, now that I *have* reached you, do you or do you not believe me?"

Drexter was silent for a time. "Oh yes," he said at last,

"I believe you. It's the biggest bombshell I've had since I joined the department, but I believe you all right."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Kay, and Colin, too, felt a wave of relief sweep through him. Not that he had ever really doubted— Or had he, at heart? Anyway, it had been a strain, and he was glad it was over.

"And there's still time to act, isn't there?" he said.

"Yes. Yes, there's still time to act. Not a lot, but enough. Hold on." He walked over to the desk, seated himself at it, and switched on the house phone. "Brentwood? Has Mr. Pockel arrived yet? Well, ask him to come up, will you? He knows the way." He switched off.

"And now, I suppose, the police?" said Colin. Now that it was so close, he did not relish that prospect at all.

"The police? No. Not immediately, at any rate. We'll see Pockel first—he's one of my men. The police can wait a little longer for their prey. This business is much more urgent." He drew on his pipe, found that it was empty, and looked fruitlessly in a tobacco jar that stood on his desk. "Never seem to have any tobacco," he said, and started rummaging in a drawer. A deferential cough from near the door made him look up. "Ah!" he said. "Come in, Pockel."

Colin, too, looked up, and his eyes widened. The door had opened soundlessly, and a man was entering—a small man, swarthy, with a drooping cheek, seen first in Cairo and last in Oban. And he had a revolver in his hand. He bowed slightly and closed the door behind him.

"Sit still, Ogilvie!" It was Drexter's voice, and Colin swung round. The baronet's hand came out of the drawer, and he, too, held a revolver.

"Alan! What on earth is this for?" Kay's face showed bewilderment and a hint of scorn. "You know Colin's going to give himself up. You don't need an armed guard for him!"

"I'm afraid I do, Kay. And for you. And Colin's *not* going to give himself up—not for twenty-four hours, anyway. After that it won't matter."

Comprehension was dawning slowly on Colin, but even

now the sheer impossibility of the thing stunned him. It just couldn't be! Not Dexter, of all people! It simply didn't make sense.

"Yes, Ogilvie, it's perfectly true." Dexter was answering the thought that showed plainly on his face. "I hadn't intended to declare myself quite like this, but you've forced my hand. I'm sorry you came along with him, Kay, but as you're here I'm afraid you're in it too."

"Dexter," said Colin, and his face was white, "if you hurt that girl I'll personally tear you apart—gun or no gun."

"Don't be heroic. I'm not going to hurt either of you, unless you're troublesome. There's no need to at this late date. I'm merely going to lock you in a room upstairs for twenty-four hours. Pockel will be on guard, and if you try to escape he'll shoot. Otherwise, you'll be quite safe till the police find you tomorrow—by which time I'll have left the country."

"Alan!" Kay was staring at him in horror. "Alan! Have you gone mad?"

"Far from it. Ah, of course! Ogilvie recognized Pockel, but you don't know him, so you're quite pardonably puzzled. The explanation's very simple, my dear. I happen to be—an associate of the gentlemen I've been ostensibly investigating. I underestimated Ogilvie's abilities—you were never meant to get out of Tyndor, of course, Ogilvie, you guessed that?—with the result that he's stampeded me into this rather melodramatic situation. I can't afford to let him go to the police, so—if you don't mind—" He jerked his head toward the door.

Kay looked at him briefly, and the contempt on her face would have shamed a much less sensitive man. Dexter flushed a dull red, and spoke brusquely. "You'll lead the way, Ogilvie, followed by Pockel. Then Kay, followed by me. And if you try any of your unarmed combat stuff she's liable to get hurt. Open the door and turn left along the passage."

Raging inwardly, but not daring to do anything about it, Colin moved to the door. Subconsciously he noticed

that it was slightly ajar, though he seemed to recall that Pockel had closed it. He pulled it open; but he did not turn left along the passage. Instead he fell back as Chief Inspector MacCallum walked in, followed by Stanners and another man.

"Good morning, Sir Alan," said the chief inspector easily. "So you've got a prisoner for us!" He walked forward toward the hesitating baronet, and then suddenly his hand darted out to Dexter's wrist. There was a second's tension, and then Dexter's revolver fell to the floor. MacCallum's genial expression vanished as if by magic.

"Alan George Dexter," he said formally, "I am taking you into custody on suspicion of being concerned in the abduction of Paul Stanley, and I warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used in evidence— Take him away, Davey. And you, Charlie, take that wee chap there who's trying to hide behind Miss Loring. He's just slipped a gun in his pocket."

"Same charge for both, sir?" asked Stanners.

"Same charge, Davcy. At present anyway."

In silence the two detectives went out with their prisoners, and MacCallum turned to the remainder of the party. Kay, rather white, had sat down. Colin, still dazed by the speed with which everything had happened, had moved to her side. The chief inspector's face lost some of its grimness, but his voice was still serious when he spoke. "Good morning, Miss Loring," he said. "Mr. Ogilvie, there's a warrant out for your arrest on a charge of murder, as perhaps you know. I am bound to warn you that—"

"I know," said Colin, and felt suddenly very weary. "I'll come quietly. May I please put Miss Loring in a taxi first?"

The answer, unexpectedly, came from Kay. "No," she said firmly, "you may not! Mr. MacCallum, I've been— what's it called?—harboring him, knowing him to be a suspected person, or whatever it is. You'll have to arrest me too."

It was her tone more than her words that snapped Colin out of his mental slough and made him bend to look into her eyes. What he saw there confirmed his wildest hopes. The defenses were down again—the flip-pant mask had vanished—and this time, he somehow knew, for good. “Don’t be a little ass,” he said fondly, took her hands, and pulled her to her feet. It brought them very close together.

“I’m *not* being an ass! I—”

“Er—hum!” MacCallum’s cough dragged them down to earth again. The chief inspector, romantic at heart as any of his race, was regarding them with a benign and understanding eye. “I’m afraid, Miss Loring,” he said, “that the question of charging you is one for the public prosecutor to decide, and in the meantime I wouldn’t like to be arresting you on my own responsibility. But don’t worry—there may be a more satisfactory way of bringing you together again, and it may not take so very long at that.” He smiled, and then made the most un-professional speech of his career. “I’ll just be going down and seeing if the car is all right,” he said. “Maybe you would bring Mr. Ogilvie along in due course?”

Chapter Fifteen

FOOTNOTES BY THE YARD

IN CANNON ROW POLICE STATION, which adjoins Scotland Yard, Colin was duly charged, cautioned, searched, and finally locked up, with the intimation that he would appear in court next day and be remanded to await an escort from the Argyll police. The cell he found rather more pleasant than he had expected, and his thoughts were by no means unhappy. MacCallum's hint of a possible early release promised well, and the golden minute he had spent with Kay, after the chief inspector's tactful exit, promised even better. His state was perilous, no doubt. But his heart remained obstinately unperturbed by the fact.

At two o'clock a uniformed constable unlocked the door and bade him follow. They went through the connecting passage into the yard itself, and up the stairs which he had first climbed with Kay and Brackett five days before. MacCallum and Stanners were in the former's office, and there his guide left him.

"Sit you down," said MacCallum hospitably, and, when he had done so, gazed at him for a time in silence. "Mr. Ogilvie," he said at last, "I'm going to suggest something a wee bit irregular. I ought perhaps to say first of all that I personally disagree with the official view—I don't think you murdered Sewell. So I'm hoping that you'll be ready to co-operate."

"Almost certainly," said Colin. "What is it you want?"

"I'm not asking you to make a written statement—in fact I'd advise you not to without your solicitor's advice—but I'd be more than grateful if you'd have a kind of an informal yarn—off the record, as the Yanks say—with Davey and myself. There's a whole lot in this case that I don't understand yet, and I've got a feeling that you could clear some of it up for me."

"You're in charge of it, then? I thought it was the Scottish police."

"It was till this morning. But the murder is so obviously part and parcel of the other business—the kidnaping and the sabotage and so on—that the high-ups decided it should all be handled together. So I'm in charge, the Argyll police working under me in so far as the Scottish aspect is concerned."

"I'm glad to hear it. Yes, of course I'll do anything I can to help you, though as far as I can see you know a lot more about it than I do. How in the name of all that's miraculous did you get on to Drexter, for instance?"

"Very simply—though we had nothing in the way of concrete proof till your visit to him this morning. But I'll tell you what I'll do. We'll make a fair swap. You tell me every detail you can remember from—say—your arrival in Morvern onward, and I'll tell you the Drexter story."

"Fair enough," said Colin.

"Then just to show willing, I'll lead off," said MacCallum. He lit a cigarette and reflected for a moment. Then, "Scotland Yard's first knowledge of this business," he said, "was last Sunday when we had that conference here in my office. And it struck me right away that there was something fishy about the whole thing. Here was Sir Alan Drexter, head of an important Home Office branch at the age of forty, with an excellent record and a considerable reputation for being clever at his job. He was investigating Christian Retrospect, and it was generally agreed that he'd never have gone off on leave if he thought there was anything amiss; yet within a few days of his going his deputy, starting on the investigation from scratch, had found out so much that he had to be got out of the way before he heard one further, seemingly innocuous, piece of information.

"There seemed to be two possible explanations of that. Either Drexter wasn't nearly as good as he was supposed to be, or else his deputy was a phenomenally brilliant

"Yes," said Colin. "It *was* rather odd, now you point it out."

"Quite so. Of course I didn't know whether the colonel *had* started from scratch—he might have been working on some line Drexter had begun—so I suspended judgment till I met Drexter himself, which I did that night. He told me he hadn't discovered anything suspicious at all—you'll mind him saying that round at your club—so I knew the colonel *had* started from nothing. Which made it very odd, for Drexter struck me as a pretty shrewd man, and not likely to spend several weeks missing something another man could find out in one."

He paused to pull at his cigarette, while his audience waited in expectant silence. "Then I started wondering how he had managed to arrive in London from Argyll so soon after the kidnaping. It seemed a wee bit *too* pat, as if he'd known about it before it was announced on the radio, and was just waiting to turn up and find out what we were doing about it. He reached Heath Row a bare three hours after the broadcast, you know."

"But he explained that," said Colin. "He'd been in Glasgow seeing about some stores, so he flew down. Otherwise he couldn't have done it. He said so."

"Precisely. He said he'd taken the train down from Connel Ferry to Glasgow that morning." He grinned at Colin's puzzled face. "Man, Mr. Ogilvie," he said, "it's well seen you're forgetting the ways of your native land. Even allowing that he could see about stores in Glasgow on a Sunday, which I doubt, he certainly couldn't have got the train down from Connel Ferry, for it doesn't run on Sundays."

"Of course it doesn't!" said Colin. "How did I miss that? And I did know it—I was thinking about it on the way up to Oban, when I was wondering why I'd been wasting my time abroad. I was thinking how Presbyterian we still are— Sorry. I'm interrupting you."

"Well," said MacCallum, "that lie told me that there was *something* wrong about Drexter, though of course it

didn't prove that he was in with the gang. But it did warrant my treating him with considerable suspicion. And then I started thinking about the setup in S.C.O.2 and wondering why only one man should be investigating Christian Retrospect instead of several, as you'd have expected. And I remembered why it was. Mr. Highway told us. It was because Drexter had made a special ruling to that effect only a few months before. And it struck me how convenient that would be if these C.R. characters *were* plotting something, and he was in with them. Again, it wasn't conclusive, but it was further grounds for keeping a watchful eye on friend Drexter."

Colin had been recalling that evening in the Absentees, and something was puzzling him. "Look here," he said, "if Drexter was in with Sewell's mob—and we now know he was—why on earth did he insist that the colonel must have been taken to Tyndor? That was a bit of a risk, wasn't it?"

MacCallum shook his head. "Not really," he said. "He knew as well as I did that Scotland Yard had no authority in Scotland and that we couldn't ask the local police to raid the house on suspicion. He's in the Home Office, so he must have known. And didn't you notice how quick he was to jump on Davey's suggestion that we should ask them, unofficially, to keep an eye on the place? No, he suggested Tyndor for two reasons: one, to find out if by any chance we thought the same, and had done anything about it; and the other was to justify his going up there himself, for presumably they were anxious to discuss Sewell's visit to Zillah, and he wanted to be present."

"But why take me along?"

"As a blind. He could easily visit the house when you weren't watching it; that first night, for instance, when you slept at Rose Cottage. And possibly—this is only a guess—he realized that they weren't going to be able to kidnap Miss Loring and use her as a lever to force the colonel to talk, and thought that you might be used to achieve the same purpose another way—by persuading

him while they listened in the next room. As you did."

"As I did!" said Colin. "What a fool I was— But wait a minute. Why couldn't Drexter have gone to the colonel himself—pretended he'd broken in? Stanley had no suspicions of him."

"No. But Drexter didn't know that. It was one of the things he wanted to find out. Hence the need for a decoy."

"Cue for Mug Ogilvie," said Colin in disgust.

"The next thing that happened," said MacCallum hastily, " was the murder and your escape. When the police called to question Niall he made them phone me, and I flew up. I'd no official standing then, of course, but the force are very co-operative in Argyllshire, especially if you have the Gaelic. Well, by the time I got there everyone had left for London, and that made me more suspicious than ever. Drexter, they told me, had accepted the 'Professor Longmore' story, which of course influenced the police to accept it, too, and although Manling had insisted on their searching the house, and even led the search himself, they'd found no trace of the colonel. Naturally enough. You'd need twenty men and an architect's plan to search that place."

"But why should Drexter's accepting the Longmore yarn make you suspicious? I expected him to accept it myself, and I didn't know he was a crook."

"You expected that, did you? Even though he knew—as they all did by that time—that when you escaped in the mist you'd gone straight to Kingairloch, calling his name on the beach and obviously hoping to see him? Why should you have done that if it wasn't that you had news for him—news you thought the police wouldn't believe, but hoped *he* would? And what could that news be but the statement you'd already failed to make the police believe—that Stanley *was* in the house—plus perhaps some further information you hadn't wanted to mention to the sergeant in front of Manling?"

"I see. I never quite thought of it like that. That's exactly what happened, of course. Yes, I suppose you're

right."

"Well, that's how it struck me. Anyway, when they didn't find the colonel it discredited you completely, and then when Drexter identified your wee dagger—"

"Oh, he did that, did he? Decent of him."

"Aye. Well, as I say, it all made me very suspicious. I could understand the local police believing Manling, but it seemed most out of keeping for Drexter to do so—if he was honest. Especially as you'll mind it was him insisted that the colonel must be in Tyndor in the first place. It seemed to me he was giving up far too easily, and that finally convinced me he was one of the gang. However, we'd no proof of anything against anyone—except you, of course—so I persuaded the superintendent to co-operate in a wee scheme I had." He smiled reminiscently.

"What was that?"

"When the guests left, Bennett, that tough manservant, sent all the local staff home, and said he and the chauffeur would act as caretakers. It might have been an innocent act, but I doubted it. So I got the superintendent to send the stupidest-looking constable he could find round to the house on Wednesday night, with instructions to watch it ostentatiously, and let drop that we were going to make another search for the colonel next day, as we weren't satisfied. I thought that would stam pede them, and it did. Bennett entertained the constable in the drawing-room while the chauffeur and the two ugly *amadhans* slipped away in the car with the old man. We picked them up at the crossroad, and then went back and arrested Bennett. Man, I wish you could have seen his face!" he chuckled hugely.

"You mean you've had Colonel Stanley safe since Wednesday night?"

"Early Thursday morning, yes."

"But surely his evidence let me out? Or at least made it sound very unlikely that I'd have gone straight off from seeing him and killed the man we were relying on to blow the gaff? And yet the hunt for me went on—"

"Just a minute, laddie. We had the colonel safe, yes—

but he was drugged, and they told us at the Oban Cottage Hospital that he wouldn't come round for at least twelve hours. In actual fact it was eighteen. When he did, incidentally, we got our city experts cracking on the Zillah angle, and I'm pretty confident that we'll be able to nip the whole sabotage ploy in the bud. But I'm getting away from the point, which is that at that time we had no evidence from him at all."

"Except the fact of his presence. Surely that was sufficient to let you arrest everybody concerned?"

"Manling and Partridge, yes, and the small fry. But not Drexler. And I didn't want to warn him by pulling in the others, and maybe have him escape altogether."

"So?"

"So I decided to make him give himself away. As he did this morning. Davey and Sergeant Simpson and I all heard him say he was an associate of the gang, when we were outside the library door. We'd opened it a crack, and your voices—"

"You mean—you mean you knew I was going round to see him? In fact, you let me go?"

MacCallum looked at him with a half-smile that broadened at the crestfallen expression on the younger man's face. "Not exactly, no. I was certain you were trying to get in touch with him—there was no other explanation for your going to Kingairloch when you escaped from Tyndor—but I never for one minute thought you'd manage it. The Scottish police were genuinely after you for murder, you see, and I was pretty sure they'd get you, but I was going to ask them to keep the arrest quiet and let you do just what you did: go and see him. I was convinced he'd act exactly as he did act. Really, I just wanted to use you the way he had done himself with the colonel in Tyndor. But I never thought you'd get through on your own."

Colin's self-esteem was returning. "For one awful moment," he said, "I thought I'd been shadowboxing these last two days."

MacCallum shook his head. "The police search," he

said, "was perfectly genuine. It wasn't called off till eight o'clock this morning, when we heard from that Trent girl that you'd reached London, and traced you to Miss Loring's flat. After that we just waited in Lowndes Square till you turned up, and followed you in."

"Eight o'clock? But what about the police message on the nine o'clock news?"

"That was just to hurry you into contacting Drexter, in case you were thinking of lying low for a bit. I sent two very obvious flatfeet round to Knightsbridge on the chance that you hadn't heard the broadcast, but you were leaving as they arrived."

"You mean they recognized me after all? I thought they were watching Kay fix—"

"Of course they recognized you. Miss Loring's a very quick-witted young lady, but she should never have expected a trick like that to deceive a real detective."

"Speak for yourself," said Stanners, joining in for the first time. "Personally, I wouldn't have noticed the Brigade of Guards go by in the circumstances—or wanted to."

The chief inspector grinned. "I said a *real* detective," he murmured insultingly. "Though to be honest I don't think these two were much better. I fancy it was really Miss Loring they recognized, for all they say— Well, Mr. Ogilvie, that's my side of the picture. And now let's have yours."

So for the third time in that eventful day Colin recounted the history of his adventures in the north. MacCallum interrupted frequently, demanding greater detail, and it was a very full account indeed that he had received by the time Colin at last sat back. "And there you are," he wound up. "If there's anything in all that that helps you with the case—especially if it helps you to pin the murder on somebody other than me—I'll be more than delighted. But I don't think there is."

MacCallum looked at him in amazement. "*Mo chreach!*" he said. "Do you mean you've missed it all?"

"Missed what?"

"All the implications of what you've been saying. You may not have given me a case against the murderer—not one that would stand up in court—but you've told me beyond a doubt who he is, and that's ninety per cent of the battle. If you know your man, getting the evidence is only a matter of time."

"I've told you who the murderer is? For Pete's sake! Who is he? Manling?"

"Drexter, of course."

"Drexter? That's impossible. He wasn't even in the house. I should say he's the one member of the gang who *couldn't* have done it."

"From what you've told me, he's the only one who could, and I'm surprised you didn't work it out for yourself. Just think back a wee bit. When you broke into Tyndor they were expecting you, weren't they? They'd cleared the way for you and planted a man in the suite to eavesdrop on you and the colonel. That means somebody had warned them you were coming."

"There may have been a burglar alarm on the window I got in by."

"That would only have indicated that someone was forcing an entry. It wouldn't have told them he was aiming for the Rob Roy suite, or that the colonel would talk to him. No, they were expecting you in person, and that means someone had warned them. And only two people could have done that, for only two people knew about it—Niall MacLean and Drexter. Theoretically it might have been either, but we don't know anything against Niall and we do know Drexter's in the gang, so the odds are strongly in favor of its being him that warned them. Agreed?"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so."

"Now think of the time factor. Drexter didn't know you were going burgling till—say—quarter past eleven. He never left your company from then until he put you ashore at midnight, so he couldn't have communicated with anyone in that time. Yet when you entered the

house at one o'clock they were ready for you. So, if we assume that it was Drexter, and not Niall, who warned them, he must have done it between twelve and one."

"He couldn't have."

"Couldn't he? I agree he couldn't have landed and gone to a public telephone—there isn't one within miles, even if he'd been prepared to risk giving a message like that over a rural exchange at such a quiet hour of the night—but he *could* have followed you up the cliffs and got into Tyndor by the front door while you were round at the back looking for a window. You'll remember your instincts told you you were being followed, but you refused to believe them, and put it down to jitters."

Colin thought of that arduous climb, and nodded. "Yes," he said, "it could be. And yet—It's the deuce of a path to find in the dark. Do you think—"

"Suppose he's been up it the night before, as he probably had. He may have been up it a dozen times in the past, for all we know. He told us he'd seen the house only from the water, but that doesn't mean a—"

"When did he say that?" Colin's voice was sharp, and MacCallum looked at him in surprise.

"Round at your club, the night we met him."

"Yes, he did. I remember now." Colin was looking very disgusted with himself. "And yet when we were discussing how I should break into the place, and he advised approaching from the sea, he said, 'You'll only be liable to observation while you're crossing that croquet lawn.' And I didn't realize at the time! Of course he couldn't have seen the croquet lawn from the sea. The little wall would hide it. So he *must* have been up there at some time."

"There you are," said MacCallum triumphantly. "Now, leave the question of who warned them for a minute and concentrate on the problem of the knife. In theory you might have dropped it any time after you landed, but in practice we know it could only be dislodged by very rough treatment. From your own account—and I questioned you closely on this—the only time you

knocked yourself hard enough to shake it out of its sheath was when you fell down that scree during your climb. There was the fight afterward, of course, but we're agreed that that wouldn't have left time for the murder. So we arrive at the fact that you could *only* have lost that knife halfway up to the house, and therefore that it *must* have been taken into the house by someone else who climbed the slope after you, but before two o'clock, when the murder was done. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"And we already have a very strong presumption that Drexter climbed up to warn them about your arrival. So, unless we accept the wild coincidence that a third man was wandering about on that particular bit of the slope at that particular time, we've got the moral certainty that Drexter was in Tyndor, with your knife, at the time of the murder."

"Moral certainties aren't evidence."

"Nobody knows that better than I do, *a laochain*, but they're a fine thing to have when you're looking for evidence. Just analyze it. Motive—to stop Sewell giving the game away, as he knew from the eavesdropping might happen. Means—the knife, picked up on his way into the house. Opportunity—he only had to follow Sewell into his room, or wait for him there. All three fit."

"Motive and opportunity fit Manling and Partridge and Bennett equally well. Why shouldn't Drexter have given the knife to one of them?"

"It's possible, but— Have you ever stuck a knife in anyone?"

"Once or twice."

"What happened to your hands? And your clothes, too, very likely?"

"I see what you mean. Blood?"

"Yes, blood, spurting from the wound. It's practically unavoidable. Yet you saw every member of the gang, except Drexter, within a couple of minutes of the murder, and you didn't notice any blood on any of them. Oh, I know it's purely negative, and it's not evidence, but it

all helps to add up. The whole lot have been arrested this morning, and now that I'm certain of my man, I fancy I'll be able to scare one of the others into giving me the evidence I want. Mankind is generally willing to save its own neck at the expense of someone else's."

"Well," said Colin, "I hope you're right, for I've no great urge to end up next to Charlie Peace in Tussaud's Waxworks. By the way, how on earth did Drexter get into a filthy racket like this in the first place? He didn't seem that sort of person at all."

"People never do," said the chief inspector sententiously. "I don't know why he got mixed up in it. Money, maybe—he keeps up a fair state, you know, well beyond his salary, and his private income may well have been hit by the war. Thousands were. Or it may have been misguided patriotism. He may genuinely have believed that the country was going to benefit in the long run—Sewell's word-spinning may have taken him in. I don't suppose we'll ever know for certain."

"Sewell's word-spinning," said Colin, "nearly took *me* in. Even now I'm not quite convinced that his principles were wrong, though of course his method of putting them into practice was— Yes. I hope misguided patriotism *is* the answer to Drexter. To be honest with you, I still rather like the chap."

MacCallum sighed, and for a moment his eyes looked very weary and very sad. "That's the worst of this job of ours," he said. "So do I."

Epilogue

SEPTEMBER MORN

THE CALENDAR SAID AUTUMN, but the morning sun, striking warm through the open windows of the bedroom, still said summer. Colin Ogilvie, sitting up in bed, yawned and reached for his tea. He had wakened up, he reflected, in a fair variety of surroundings these last three months, from the well-sprung luxury of the Absentees Club to the cheerless damp of Castle Stalker, from the homely comfort of Rose Cottage to the functional austerity of a prison cell. But this furnished flat, which had now been his for a fortnight, was the most pleasing of the lot. There was much to be said for having one's own home, he felt, and looked around the room with the pride of possession that even furnished tenancy brings. Yes, he was settling down all right. A few months of this and he would probably be a respectable citizen.

Three letters lay on the tea tray: a blue one in neat but unknown handwriting, forwarded from the club; a buff one, typewritten and obviously official; and a large, cream-colored one with a United States stamp, addressed in the flowing hand of Claire Veness. On the childhood principle of bread-and-butter before cake, and the icing last of all, he laid the blue envelope on top of the cream one and opened the buff.

It was from some illegible signatory "for the Under-secretary of State for Home Affairs," and was couched in the limpid prose common to such communications. *Sir, it said, I am directed to refer to the conversations recently held between yourself and Colonel Stanley, of this department, on the subject of your possible employment within the establishment of the department. I am to say that, as adumbrated by Colonel Stanley during these conversations, the establishment of the department has now been revised to include, inter alia, the post of inspector.*

I am to confirm Colonel Stanley's verbal suggestion that you should occupy this post, of the duties attaching whereto I understand that he has already advised you.

So he had got the job! And a very interesting job, too, if it panned out as he and the colonel envisaged it—a sort of cross between a detective and a special investigator, with a dash of political correspondent thrown in; not to mention the ever-present possibility of an occasional fight. Yes, it certainly promised better than a weary progress through Caesar's Gaul with the Second Form.

How about the money, he wondered, and went back to the letter. From a welter of "emoluments" and "incremental progressions"—what on earth was an incremental progression?—he gathered that the illegible gentleman was directed to offer him a not unreasonable salary, and that he was expected to start work on Monday. So that was that.

He slit open the blue envelope and unfolded the two sheets within. *Dear Ogilvie*, he read, *I don't know why I'm writing—to you of all people—save that I feel, in this last hour or two of life—* Quickly he turned to the signature, a bold and uncompromising A. G. Drester; then, with a frown that was part pity and part regret, read through that postscript to failure.

Poor devil! His patriotism, misled and misapplied though it was, had at least been genuine. "All the conspirators, save only he, did that they did—" The old Shakespearean tag came to his mind. It wasn't quite accurate, of course, for Sewell, too, had been honest. But the others— His lip curled as he remembered Manling in court, whining the story of Drester's guilt, in deadly fear that he himself would suffer as an accessory. Well, he *would* suffer; more, probably, than Drester. Manling had got a life sentence, and Partridge ten years, which would probably come to the same thing. And Drester, the pick of the bunch, had been hanged. "He only, in a general honest thought, and common good to all, made one of them." Yes, the comparison was not too

farfetched. Brutus and Drexter *had* something in common. And certainly, "Nature might stand up, and say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"

With an effort he brought himself back toward normal. It was no good brooding over the past. The thing was finished, and there was nothing anyone could do about it now. He lifted the third envelope, and resolutely opened it.

For the first page or so, however, he scarcely knew what he was reading. The somber memories evoked by Drexter's letter still lay heavy on his mind, and Claire's easy, conversational style did not break through them. Then the word "marry" hit him suddenly, and, coming to, he reread the paragraph.

He's built on "blond beast" lines like yourself, said the letter, and just about as crazy, only of course he's a lot older. Forty, in fact; so Life begins any time now. To be exact, next spring, for we neither of us want to marry till we can take a real vacation to get over it, and right now I'm working like mad, glamorizing sun-tanned womanhood back to the fashionable fall pallor, and he's eye-deep in some deal or other that won't let up till April—

Colin stopped reading for a moment. So Claire was going to marry again! Somehow he had never thought of such a possibility. And yet there was no reason on earth why she shouldn't, and every reason why she should. She was still young, attractive, intelligent— He wondered why the news depressed him so much, and realized, with a shock, that he was suffering from irrational, unwarranted, but quite unmistakable jealousy. His reason told him, with truth, that he, of all people, had less than no justification for it; but still the feeling persisted. He shook himself, and returned to the letter.

Thinking it over, said Claire, I'm quite convinced that I've got you to thank for this. When Bill died I went into a spiritual fastness and dared the world to touch me. Then came that fantastic day in Scotland, that jolted me back into an existence where people weren't just

clients or passers-by, but People—living bits of the same big thing that I'm a living bit of. Life became three-dimensional again, and those two wonderful evenings you gave me in London merely confirmed it. Playing Flora MacDonald to your Prince Charles did something to me, Colin, and broke down the fastness walls forever. So thank you—very, very much.

He read on, smiling ruefully, to the final flourish of *Love, CLAIRE*; then laid down the letter. Well, she would probably be very happy, and God knew she deserved to be, for she was a very grand person. Still—He couldn't help a slight feeling of quite unreasonable resentment.

Then his eye, straying back to her letter, noticed that there was a postscript. He read it. *And how goes the Ogilvie love life?* it asked. *Remember that girl you took such pains to keep me from meeting in London? Kay Loring, wasn't it? Whatever happened to her?*

Colin laughed aloud. Had his tactful maneuverings really been as obvious as that? Oh, well! Let it go!

He glanced at his watch, saw that it was eight-thirty, and reached for the phone. There was no harm in finding out what *had* happened to Kay in the nine hours since he had last seen her. He dialed Ken 1626. It rang for a time, and then was answered by the voice that still thrilled him every time he heard it.

"Hullo?" she said.

"Do you still love me?" asked Colin conversationally.

"Of course I do, darling. Who is that speaking?"

"Old, my pet, old. A very hoary chestnut. How soon can we meet?"

"Have a heart! I've only been up for five minutes."

"You have? Let me picture you. A vision of loveliness, that gorgeous hair framing those flawless features, the form divine swathed in a mist of sea-green chiffon, the—"

"And which of your friends wears sea-green chiffon, Mr. Ogilvie?"

"Wasn't it you? Oh—Powder-blue ninon?"

"This is Kensington 1626. Kay Loring speaking."

"I remember now. Dove-gray gossamer."

He heard her chuckle. "At the moment," she said, "to be strictly accurate, shell-pink Loring. I was just getting out of my bath when the phone rang."

"Sorry, darling. I won't keep you hanging about. I only rang to say that, as from Monday, I cease to be unemployed. I furl my little umbrella, tilt the bowler hat to a decorous angle, and become a civil servant."

"Oh, I'm so glad, Colin. The job's come through officially, then?"

"Heard this morning. So I wondered if there was any chance of a mild celebration with my affianced bride."

"Every chance, I should think. Your affianced bride likes celebrations. Will you come round, or shall we meet somewhere? No, you'd better come round. Will you?"

"Like a bee to the flower," said Colin poetically. "So dry off that dew, and put on your smartest petals. I'll be right over."

He hung up and smiled thoughtfully. All his life, he reflected, domesticity had hung like a black cloud menacing the future, a gloomy but unavoidable fate that would mean an end to all joy in living. The war had postponed it, and his protracted return from India had given him further grace; but three months ago he had said good-by to romance, and resolutely turned to face the inevitable. And now, at last, domesticity was here. His smile became a grin, and his eyes turned to the photograph of Kay that crowned his mantelpiece. What an ass he had been all these years!

